



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

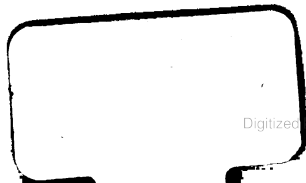


3 3433 07481186 4

JANE



Anna Alice Chapin



31. 1. A
B C

JANE

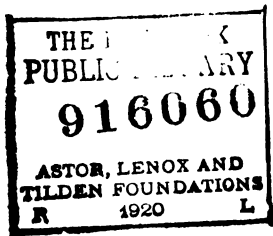
BY

ANNA ALICE CHAPIN



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press

1920



COPYRIGHT, 1920

BY

ANNA ALICE CHAPIN



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—THE HOBLILLIES AND THE JOBLILLIES	I
II.—JANE AND HER JABBERWOCK	16
III.—OTHO	29
IV.—BEYOND THE SKY LINE	43
V.—THE FLITTING	56
VI.—UNDER THE MOON	68
VII.—THE TRAIN FOR NEW YORK	82
VIII.—THE STRANGE ROADS	98
IX.—THE FIRST MORNING	110
X.—TOM MAKES A MISTAKE	126
XI.—ON THE ROAD	140
XII.—IN PICO	152
XIII.—MISS L. MADDEN	166
XIV.—OTHO'S MISTAKE	183
XV.—AT THE GATEWAY	200

Gift of Pub. Works. *George Eastman* 1900

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVI.—NETTIE LLEWELLYN'S CODE—AND ANOTHER	214
XVII.—CONTRASTS AND COMBINATIONS	229
XVIII.—OTHO'S MAGIC	245
XIX.—BY THE LIGHTS OF CHINATOWN	258
XX.—AT GROGAN'S	274
XXI.—JANE PLAYS A RESCUE SCENE	286
XXII.—AND TOM STAGES A RESCUE OF HIS OWN	302
XXIII.—THE SPINNING OF THE TOP	313
XXIV.—THE BARGAIN	324
XXV.—THE PAST REVISITED	339
XXVI.—CLIMAX AND ANTI-CLIMAX	351
XXVII.—THE CHANGING TIDES	359

JANE

JANE

CHAPTER I

THE HOBLILLIES AND THE JOBLILLIES

And she went into the garden to cut a cabbage leaf to make an apple pie, and at the same time the great she-bear walking down the street poked her head into the shop. "What, no soap?" So he died, and she very imprudently married the barber. And there were present at the wedding all the Hoblillies and the Joblillies and the Grand Panjandrum himself with the little round button at the top. And they all played catch-as-catch-can till the gunpowder ran out of the heels of their boots, so it did.

S. FOOTE.

“““ WHAT no soap?” So he died, and she very imprudently married the barber,”” chanted Jane, at the top of her exceedingly shrill ten-year-old voice. She was executing a curious sort of war dance in a syncopated rhythm which she deemed appropriate to the classic which she was intoning. And, as she danced and sang, as she did everything else, with supreme abandon and enthusiasm, she

rendered her mother speechless for at least a quarter of a minute.

Her mother, who was enjoying the actual last hour of being Mrs. O'Reilly, widow, before entering upon the title of Mrs. Molling Weede, bride, stood at the door helplessly watching her youngest hope as she gyrated about among the wedding decorations.

Jane finished an especially agile whirl, and proceeded, in a higher key and with a fresh burst of energy:

“*And* there were present at the wedding all the Hoblillies and the Joblillies——”

Mrs. O'Reilly gasped and took a step forward.

“*And* the Grand Panjandrum himself with the little round button at the top——”

“Jane!”

Jane heard, but she had to finish. She did, however, hurry it up as much as she possibly could.

“*And* they all played catch-as-catch-can,” she shrilled volubly, “*till* the——”

“*Jane!*”

“*Till* the gunpowder ran out of the heels of their boots, so it *did!*” Jane finished in a piercing tone, and wheeled around somewhat breathless.

The Hoblillies and the Joblillies 3

"'Scuse me, mother, but it does just seem to fit, doesn't it?"

Her mother promptly boxed her ears.

It was quite a matter of routine in the household. Mrs. O'Reilly had a rooted, unemotional conviction that the puzzling processes that went on in her daughter's head could best be gotten rid of by consistent and repeated forcible shocks. She varied this by shakings, on the same theory that some of her "queerness" would thereby get shaken out of her. It is true that Jane nearly lost her wits and senses and a few teeth under this treatment, but she stayed as queer as ever.

Understand, Mrs. O'Reilly was neither a cruel nor a passionate-tempered woman. She was merely an unimaginative and an obstinate one. Her first-born, Theodosia, had never had to be shaken. She was infinitely naughtier than Jane, and more complexedly so, but she was always a "perfect little lady," and would duly grow up a "sweet, womanly girl." This disarming hallmark of excessive femininity protected her. Not so Jane. The younger sister was a good deal more like a puppy or a kitten than a mannerly little girl, and her chastisements were of the sort that a rigid disciplinarian might administer to the puppy

or the kitten in the course of its education. The trouble was that, so far as Mrs. O'Reilly could see, the judicial maternal penalty never had any effect upon Jane. She would gasp, wriggle, and bob up as queer, as irrepressible, as Jane-like as ever. It was annoying to a conscientious parent.

On this particular occasion Mrs. O'Reilly, perhaps pardonably, was more stirred than was her wont. As a rule, when she punished Jane, she was as impassionate as an automaton of justice, but today her round face was flushed with something approaching angry animation; her small grey eyes positively sparkled, as she boxed, shook, and admonished Jane.

On her wedding day—and such a fine match, too, with you don't know what all people coming, and a gentleman worth ten of poor O'Reilly, God rest his sinful soul—to have a child of hers making a mock of her and the good new father she'd got for her, like a little heathen—it was a shame, that it was! So take that now, for a naughty, impudent, unladylike girl, the spit and image of him!

The bride paused, out of breath. The emotion and exertion had given her a good colour, and as she was not an ill-looking woman, it was becoming.

The Hoblillies and the Joblillies 5

Jane regarded her with an entirely impersonal approval.

"It makes you look nice when you hit me hard, mother," she observed. Then she sighed. "Well, it's good for something, then," she said philosophically. And immediately got hit again.

"I declare," exclaimed her mother, "I don't know what to do with you, that I don't! You'll never be a little lady like 'Dosia!"

"No," agreed Jane, readily.

In her heart she had no regrets; she did not think much of 'Dosia. But even her intrepid spirit saw no sense in inviting more ear boxing. Indeed, she tactfully made the suggestion that it was getting late, and Mrs. O'Reilly hastened away to adjust the last touches of her bridal finery. From her plump retreating form floated back the adjuration:

"Go put on your clean dress like a good child!"

Jane wished to retort reasonably enough that doing things like a good child was not her strongest point, but once more refrained. She had, however, not the slightest intention of putting on the clean dress. It was murderously ugly—a horrid, reddish-pink muslin, clumsily made, and to Jane had been given a beauty-loving soul. Such a possession is destined to give its owner a great deal more pain

Jane

than pleasure, in the course of our commonly un-beautiful earthly life. No, Jane did not mean to dress for the wedding, and stand, clad in reddish-pink, among the Hoblillies and the Joblillies, but she did nevertheless intend to witness the august ceremony which should unite her mother with the Grand Panjandrum.

It was to take place here in the sitting-room, an apartment which was perhaps the only one in the house in which its lethargic mistress never sat. In the kitchen, in the dining-room, in the bedrooms, on the back porch and the front piazza, even in hallways and on stair landings, was planted an endless chain of chairs on which Mrs. O'Reilly could sink at frequent intervals to rest from her incredibly shiftless housekeeping. But the horsehair of the sitting-room knew her not. It was opened for wakes and weddings and christenings, and for nothing else. There was a tradition that it was kept for "entertaining," but as Mrs. O'Reilly's entertainments were invariably of the "cup o' tea in the kitchen" variety, it was left cheerlessly and dustily alone from year to year. The cup o' tea in the kitchen was, as the lady of the house truthfully said, more cosy. It was also a lot less trouble.

The Hoblillies and the Joblillies 7

This is not a digression. It is to explain why Jane knew a vast deal more about the sitting-room than did her mother. For Jane had the explorer's spirit, and many had been her secret expeditions into the musty and oppressive gloom of the horse-haired sitting-room. No one ever came into it to disturb her, and she had roamed about among its unfriendly looking walnut "pieces" until they really appeared quite homelike to her. She had ransacked the dreadful cabinet in the corner, containing the petrified funeral wreath; the necklace of sharks' teeth brought home by some seafaring relative; the Chinese idol which for years she had accepted as the authentic likeness of the Lord Almighty and had caused her to dislike Him accordingly; and the other strange and grisly things which a certain type of mind enjoys assembling and treasuring. She had once in a burst of secret daring—and when her mother was out—touched the yellow keys of an instrument which looked something like a piano, and sounded like a cascade of tin spoons. And, in her explorations, she had once mounted to the top of a mighty wardrobe, which stood far back at the end of the room in dingy and cobwebby obscurity.

A wardrobe is rarely recognized as a welcome

addition to the furniture of a parlour, but Mrs. O'Reilly had the originality of ignorance. It was a large, expensive "piece," so there in the sitting-room it stood, probably the ugliest and most ponderous wardrobe on earth,—even in the walnut family.

Jane, who could climb like a wildcat or a sailor, had found that she could reach the summit of this monument to a dark age in art, by clambering first to the top of the piano. And it was from this exalted and exclusive gallery seat that she purposed to view the wedding.

She now proceeded to mount cautiously but quickly, for already she could hear the echo of voices in the front hall. And there were wheels outside the house, and shuffling steps on the piazza. The company was beginning to arrive.

She grinned joyously from the top of the wardrobe, sitting cross-legged, much in the pose of the Chinese god which had made her so grievously misjudge her Creator. On one side of her was a glass bell inverted over a nosegay of pink and green wax flowers; on the other, a huge vase, of a squat, bulbous shape, ornamented with gilt curlicues and almost hideous enough to fittingly top the wardrobe.

The Hoblillies and the Joblillies 9

Jane settled herself comfortably, surveying the room, which was no longer dark nor dusty, but swept for the occasion, and likewise garnished in a sprightly bridal fashion. And she waited, with the keen expectancy of the nature that is always intensely interested in everything, for the entrance of the Hoblillies and the Joblillies.

She had inherited absolutely nothing from her mother except her sex and her first name. It was from her Irish, good-for-nothing, easy-going father that she came by her thick, rust-red hair and her whimsical mouth, her twinkling green eyes set in a slant that was disconcertingly impish, her utter fearlessness, and her restless love for the open—one day to lead her onto gypsy trails better suited to the feet of men than of maids. From him too was her most signal heritage—once again better fitted for men than maids—an acute and merciless sense of humour.

A sense of humour is a very excellent thing in males. It adds vastly to the spices and sweets of their existence. It leavens the dough of their every-day materiality with streaks of fancy and freakishness. In many of them, it takes the place both of imagination and good temper, and it pleasantly oils the wheels of this somewhat ponder-

ously revolving world. But for a woman it is quite another matter. If she be born with it, she is indubitably a pleasanter person to live with; but for herself it is a veritable witch's blessing—the unasked-for gift that the cruel fairy leaves at the cradle of some hapless little girl babies.

For the woman with a sense of humour can never take herself seriously. In her mental mirror she may never pose as the heroine either of tragedy or romance. Her particular imp will make her see the redness of nose that accompanies despair, and the fatuous simper that is the sign manual of prosperous love. She has, in fine, been cheated out of her birthright, and the pleasure of seeing herself in a graver and more important light than anything else in the whole world is for ever denied her.

At the time this story begins, however, Jane was not conscious of her misfortune. She had, it is true, discovered that she found most persons funny and that they disliked her for it, but she did not care much—yet.

I find that I have not really told you what Jane was like. I am afraid I can't. I know her so well, you see, and it is always hard to describe an intimate friend. It would seem that you must make her acquaintance by degrees.

The Hoblillies and the Joblillies 11

As to her looks (I've told you the colour of her eyes and hair), she was strange and rather adorable. Her little teeth, white as nut kernels, were set a bit crookedly, giving her a look that was more piquant than ugly,—the look of some small, attractive animal, or quaint, half-mortal sprite.

“To look at ye, sure, I'd say ye were the leprechaun breed crossed with a squirrel,” had declared the late Barney O'Reilly, whose talk, for all its whimsies, was apt to smack of the stud farm, or the kennels.

But Jane was not really like the leprechaun, most delicate and dainty of Celtic fairies. She was too practical, and—again—her sense of humour was apt to ride her fancy with a somewhat too harassing curb.

While she sat on her perch in the sitting-room, the door opened and the bridegroom entered with several Hoblillies and Joblillies, *i.e.*, Mrs. Bridget Cooney of next door but one, and the two gigglety girls who worked at the soda fountain round the corner. They were looking adoringly at Mr. Weede, for they were trained to admire masculinity in a rather cloying manner, and he was a fine figure of a man.

Mr. Molling Weede was a portentous sort of

person. Upon looking at him one felt at once that he was a personage. He exhaled influence, plenty, prosperity. He was large and rotund and massive. A supreme, supernal calm rested upon his fine, roomy countenance. As Jane said, his last name did not sound at all like him, his next to the last,—unctuous, impressive and round,—did. He had a very hoarse, thick voice, attributable to asthma and excess of flesh. And he further had a maddening habit of shutting his eyes tightly before delivering himself of his more epoch-making sentences. He was, in fact, the incarnation of the Grand Panjandrum himself, and it would have required an infinitely less resourceful brain than Jane's to perceive in the carefully oiled lock of black hair upon his domelike forehead the original "little round button at the top."

Jane, who was deeply curious by temperament, cogitated to the utmost elastic extent of her ten years as to why any one should want to marry Mr. Molling Weede; least of all her mother, who had once been married to Barney O'Reilly. Jane could remember her father, and the recollection was a warm, colourful one,—not altogether comfortable, since he had been often drunk and always obstreperously noisy, but decidedly one to fire the heart.

The Hoblillies and the Joblillies 13

Mrs. O'Reilly's heart, however, had never been fired by anything.

She was the sort of woman who, while appearing soft and flaccid, is really adamant. In her the putty which had seemed to go to her making had hardened to a sort of inflexible clay. Hers was such characterlessness that it had become a dominant characteristic. She was so fixed in her egotistical atrophy that she was really far less yielding than substances that looked firmer.

She now entered the room for her wedding, a colourless, placid smile upon the loose lips that suggested weakness but concealed mulishness. She wore a stiff grey silk gown that creaked ostentatiously when she moved. She had had her hair elaborately dressed early that morning. She was a portly, prosperous bride for a portly, prosperous bridegroom. Both were "well fixed," and looked it; and both were content.

It was a most suitable marriage. Society, in the person of the assembled and assembling Hoblillies and Joblillies, approved. Heaven pronounced its blessing, in the person of Father Connelly, dear man,—a jovial, kindly, casual soul, with a shocking bad memory and the record of a hundred cheery mistakes as to what particular service he was

reading. Family affection, in the person of that perfect little lady Theodosia, shed a few sentimental tears over the vision of the domestic bliss opening out for darling mamma. It was all really quite perfect. Everyone smiled with that mingled satisfaction that comes from the sense of a dutiful social approbation, one's best clothes, and the near prospect of hearty and indigestible refreshments. Jane too smiled,—nay, grinned,—from her walnut mountain.

Father Connelly bestowed a fervent but hurried benediction. No one took his office more seriously than that saintly man, but he had had a busy morning, and he, too, could smell roast ham and plum cake. Mr. Molling Weede bent forward with a beautiful dignity to embrace his spouse. And—there was a crash that rent the air, and caused the poor Father to nearly leap from his cassock.

“Mother of Heaven,—*what was that?*”

It was Jane, accompanied by the curlycue vase and the wax bouquet.

Having been made of India rubber in the first place, she was not at all hurt when she alighted; but this was not long to be the case. After a short but exhilarating chase by the company of Hoblillies and Joblillies, she was finally captured, and Mrs.

The Hoblillies and the Joblillies 15

Molling Weede's first act under her new title was to administer the customary shaking with an especially pious zeal and zest.

But Jane, when released, sat on the floor, shameless creature, and shrieked with immoral and unchastened mirth.

"*What* are you laughing at, you sinful child?" demanded Mr. Molling Weede, in an awful voice made more awful by hoarseness.

Jane looked about at the breathless and rumped guests, and went on laughing.

"And they all played catch-as-catch-can till the gunpowder ran out of the heels of their boots, so it did!" she gasped.

"She is mad!" exclaimed Mr. Molling Weede.

CHAPTER II

JANE AND HER JABBERWOCK

I think every family should have a dog. . . . He tells no tales, betrays no secrets, never sulks, asks no troublesome questions . . . is always ready for a bit of fun. . . .

Dr. JOHN BROWN.

THE passing seasons were all thrilling to Jane O'Reilly. She had a keen sense of drama, excavating it somehow from all things about her, and even every-day happenings became of absorbing interest seen through her eyes. It was not so much that she unduly glorified the commonplace, for her vision was not the veiled vision of idealists. It was, rather, that infinitely rare thing, the unlying sight of the inveterate seeker and seer. The lens of her mind was so finely focussed that even little matters stood out clearly and justly; she missed none of them, and so missed none of their fascination and import. It was this intensely alive, true quality of perception that made her chief happiness, and in a measure compensated her for such pangs as her

manlike appreciation of the ridiculous, and her artistlike yearning for the beautiful.

So seven full years—full of such immeasurable trifles as would have spelled boredom to the usual child—fled by with the speed of an exciting panorama for Jane. Her brain held priceless memories of small human happenings, tragic or gay, bits of colour from the patchwork of life, warm fragments of the homely, common old world which she loved so dearly, every jot of which went to make her what she was. And Jane at seventeen was the most generous, the most whimsical, and the most merry-hearted little creature who ever drudged for and laughed at an ungrateful universe. If you do not find her a dear person, be sure it is the writer's fault, for she was.

The Molling Weedes had gone up in the world. The Grand Panjandrum had acquired property, and for every lot, he added something to his waist measurement and to the proud angle at which he carried his proud head. He swelled visibly, not figuratively but by inches, as he achieved financial merit. Where before he had merely exhaled a subtle effluvium of greatness, he now seemed to exude it in an almost materially oily fashion. He had, in short, put on some seventy pounds, and

was, as he walked down Centre Street, an awe-inspiring, not to say an appalling spectacle.

His wife, one time the buxom Widow O'Reilly, had gone down and in as he had gone up and out. Always soft and undulant of flesh, she was now more like a bundle of old clothes than a woman with blood and bones. Those plump curves and well-packed tissues sagged pitiably, and there was a dulness in her small grey eyes. Mr. Molling Weede had beaten her at mulishness; she was vanquished, and she was not graceful in defeat. She still kept up a sullen pretence at obstinacy, refusing sulkily to hear her husband when he laid down his mandates, but she never dared to disobey him.

Theodosia, perfect little lady that she was, knew a perfectly catlike joy in her darling mamma's overthrowal. She had a certain very tempered affection for her parent, as became her breed or type, but it was not sufficiently strong to keep her from slyly exulting when she saw her dethroned. This sort of sweet and essentially "feminine" brutality was left out of our Jane. Yes, Jane—the little heathen, the offspring of reckless, dissipated Barney O'Reilly, the red-haired beneficiary of the legacy of humour—was sorry for her mother.

"That beastly old devil has been slanging her

again!" she growled to Theodosia, with a particularly fierce frown upon her small face, one sultry August afternoon, as the sisters were shelling peas upon the back porch. At least, Jane was shelling peas. 'Dosia, as usual, was sitting in a shady corner, preening her rather pretty hands.

'Dosia fussing over her hands suggested a bird caressing its own sleek plumage. She would pat and rub them softly, bend the slender fingers with tenderness, examine the pink nails, push back the cuticle with lingering touches, turn them over and stroke and smooth them as though laying the finishing touches to some priceless and fragile work of art. You would almost expect to see them shine as from some invisible polish when she got through with them. The process always amused Jane, but she no longer laughed at it openly, as she would have a few years before. In Jane's sense of the ridiculous there was no vestige of malice or ill humour.

Theodosia cuddled a dainty little finger attentively for a second in silence as from a window in the room behind them came a regular, sniffing sort of sobbing, not loud and not particularly despairing, but expressive of the misery of impotent resentment and hopelessness. Mr. Molling Weede

did not permit his wife to weep turbulently; it disturbed him. So she had adopted this ceaseless, secret plaint as a safety valve for her overflowing bitterness toward him and existence in general.

"Don't you suppose," 'Dosia said, dropping her voice, "that she ever gets tired snivelling like that? I can't think of anything in the world that would make me cry as much as she does."

"You haven't tried Mr. Weede," said Jane, flipping an empty pod at an inquisitive hen that was stepping jerkily around the corner of the house. "'Dosia, that hand must be nearly done!"

The affectionate bantering tone did not hurt 'Dosia's feelings. She smiled complacently, and held up the white and pink ornament which was the pride of her life.

"If you'd just take a little more care of yourself, Jennie," she said in a very elder-sisterly way, "you wouldn't be bad looking yourself."

Jane laughed. "Haven't time!" she said. "Anyhow, I don't expect fixing up would improve me much. I'm like Jab; you couldn't make *him* a nice parlour dog, could you?"

"You could *not*! Horrid, dirty little mongrel——"

"Hold your horses!" said Jane. "He isn't

dirty. But he isn't pretty exactly, any more than I am."

"Well, you neither of you can help it," said Theodosia without the slightest attempt at humour.

"Dosia," chuckled Jane appreciatively, "I'd love to be you for just five minutes to find out how it feels!"

"Oh, well," said Theodosia, not understanding at all, "it would be silly for me not to know I'm good-looking. Wouldn't it?"

"It would," replied Jane. "Come to think of it, I don't believe I do want to be you, even for the five minutes. I couldn't stand the strain."

There was a curious resemblance between the sisters in appearance if you went by hair and colouring and general disposition of features, but there the likeness ended. Theodosia's nose was the straighter but the less expressive; her eyes were larger and darker but less bright; her hair was a far lovelier shade than Jane's, but it did not grow in the perverse and fascinating fashion of the other girl's. Jane's hair, like all the rest of her, seemed as living as flame,—and not so unlike it in tone, for that matter. Both sisters were fair of skin, but Jane was freckled like a sun-kissed pear. Theodosia was taller, more prettily rounded, infinitely more

graceful and fair and pleasing to the eye, but to Jane she was as the painted picture is to the vital and vivid flesh.

"Why do you always stand up for mamma so?" demanded 'Dosia, after another short silence. "She used to hit you often enough, I'm sure."

Jane twinkled.

"I suppose," she remarked gravely, "that's it. Sort of a bond, you know."

Theodosia stared at her.

"Jennie," she said, "sometimes I think there's something the matter with your brain."

"No! Do you?" Jane appeared to consider this reflectively. "I shouldn't be surprised," she decided. "Sometimes I feel quite, quite strange, 'Dosia!" She was a born actress, and her expression became really creepy. 'Dosia found her green eyes distinctly frightening;—it was by no means for the first time. "'Dosia," she went on, in a solemn undertone, "do *you* ever feel—like that?"

"Like what, Jennie?" whispered Theodosia, half hypnotized.

"Like—doing queer things,—very queer!" Jane hissed. "Like doing strange, wicked, crawly things to people, that will make them curl and wiggle, and——"

"Jane, stop it! You look awful! No, of course, I don't. When do *you* feel like that, Jennie?"

"When I watch Mr. Weede eat eggs for breakfast!" muttered Jane hoarsely. "When I see the hideous yellow yolks and the ghastly pale whites dribble down his shirt front! When I gaze upon the long smear of hair oil upon his bald head where the little round button sits! When——"

"Jane!" exclaimed Theodosia indignantly. "You're making fun!"

Jane laughed out, but it was a bitter little laugh, without her usual gay note.

"It's the only way I can stand him at all!" she said with a small shudder of disgust. "And you call him 'papa'! Ugh!"

'Dosia looked uncomfortable. She had indeed acceded to her stepfather's wish in this matter, and it was even generally understood that when she was nineteen she would formally take his name, and that he would make her his heir. But she did not like him much better than Jane did.

"It's only on account of the money," she now confessed, in one of those unexpected and disconcerting bursts of candour to which perfectly hardened mercenaries occasionally treat their confidants. "He's an old beast, but he'll leave me

something when he dies. He won't *you*, Jennie!"

Jane looked at her a minute.

"Do you know," she said, "there's something rather—rather—what is the word I want?—it's something like—grand. There's something rather grand about going after what you want like that, 'Dosia. I really think it's a lot better for you to make up to the Panjandrum for his money than because you like him. If you *liked* a creature like that— Oh, by the way, 'Dosia, if you don't want me to burn up your new switch, don't call me Jennie."

"It's no worse than Jane—Jane O'Reilly!"

"It's two letters' worse. And I'm proud of the O'Reilly part."

Theodosia opened her lips, thought better of it, and closed them again. It was never advisable to mention the paternal shortcomings to Jane; poor, shiftless Barney O'Reilly's rollicking image was perhaps the only thing which his daughter truly idealized.

"But Jennie, if you'd only——"

"Nix on the Jennie!" interrupted her sister slangily. "Remember that switch! And you know I'd do it like a shot."

Theodosia did know, and fell silent discreetly.

Her mother called to her in lugubrious accents, and she went into the house on dainty ladylike high heels, with a mincing ladylike tread. Jane was alone, and the peas were shelled.

Her eager gaze darted out into the quiet, sunny little back yard filled with low-clucking chickens and droning insect voices; paused a moment at the edge of the orchard beyond the fence; and finally fixed itself upon a golden meadow that rolled upward to a hill crest and ended in blue sky and some unseen valley.

"I believe I'll play hooky!" she said to herself. And as her thoughts and acts were nearly always in automatic unison, she promptly played hooky. She set down the full pan of peas, gave a wary look about, and sped across the yard, scattering chickens as she went, and nearly falling headlong over a length of garden hose.

At the gate she paused to whistle softly.

A ragged yellow dog with an incredible number of vivacious legs and tails projected itself from the woodshed in a whirling ball of yapping, intoxicated action.

"Sh!" whispered Jane sternly.

He sh'd as much as he could, made a frenzied detour in order to crawl adventurously under the

fence rather than trot tamely through the gateway, and joined her, still yapping though less vociferously. His name was Jabberwock, and it was quite impossible to count the strains of canine ancestry that made up his entire family pedigree.

His flapping ears stood almost upright:—"That's French bull," said Jane, regarding him. His long tail trembled joyously,—a very long slim tail:—"That's mastiff, I think," she decided, though doubtfully. His sharp nose was pointed worshipfully upwards:—"That's fox terrier," she went on.

He sprang up to lick her hand in loving and enthusiastic faith, and she stooped to hug him. "That's just plain dog!" she whispered tenderly. "Come on, Jabberwock with eyes aflame! We'll go whiffing through the turgy wood, shall we?"

Oh, the passionate pride and rapture of Jabberwock as he set forth with the one known god of his idolatry! Already Jane had learned that in this lonely world there is no real companion but a dog. He and he alone understands and meets your every mood and impulse; there is no consoler so sympathetic, no good comrade on the road so untiring and eager. A dog does not suggest that it looks like rain and that he would rather stay indoors;

he does not complain of nor even comment upon the cold or the heat or the mud or the rough going. If you like it, he does;—nay, he loves it, revels in it, just because you have chosen it. He consults you anxiously in turning new corners, and, your decision once made, hurls himself upon the chosen route in an ecstasy of satisfaction over your inspired judgment.

So it was with Jane and her Jabberwock.

They went together through the drowsy summer orchard, Jabberwock ambling along more peacefully here, as became the mood of the quiet, brooding trees, and out into the sunlit meadow where the dog went careering off as if to race the wind itself. And on the crest of the hill they paused, looking down into the valley.

Below them, the grassy hillside sloped to a tangle of wild-growing, soft-coloured things—iris and milkweed, and black-eyed Susans, which edged a country road. Jane often came this way, preferring it to the increasingly urban village streets where she lived. Here the real country was still to be found,—marred a bit by trolley cars, and automobiles, and not sufficiently distant railway stations, but still country. There were a few farmhouses that had wells instead of piped water, and

fields with big, plodding plough horses instead of scientific tractors. Across a rolling mile of meadows a wood—a real wood—showed darkly green against the sunny sky.

“Shall we go to the wood, Jab?” asked Jane, considering.

Jab yapped hasty assent, reserving, however, his highest note of enthusiasm until she should definitely make up her mind.

“No,” said Jane, slowly, “I think today we will walk along the road and see what is happening. I feel like people today. Come on, Jab, maybe we’ll meet some more dogs!”

“Splendid!” barked Jab triumphantly. “What a simply great idea! How did you know it was just what I wanted to do?”

CHAPTER III

OTHO

There's something of the woman in his nature
That makes his manliness a finer thing. . . .

RICHARD HOVEY.

JANE and Jabberwock trotted along the warm country road at an evenly matched gait.

This may sound odd when you consider that Jane was, in her own quaint fashion, a singularly graceful little person,—indeed her natural ease of movement was one of her few beauties,—but if you stop to think, you will realize that you have yet to see the small animal that is not instinctively and inherently graceful. Puppies, kittens, grown-up cats and dogs, squirrels, weasels, rabbits, even the contumelious mouse, run and leap and go through the continuous and varied motions of living as though they were posing for the most discriminating of animal painters. Indeed, it is only upon canvas that a four-footed thing ever becomes stiff or awkward. Jab, incomparable mongrel,

placed his feet more daintily than any fine lady; so did his mistress. His whole lean, nervous body bore itself easily and strongly, yielding with the satisfying ease of unspoiled nature to the pleasant exertion he was making; Jane's young body did the same. They were a fine pair of wayfarers, oddly alike in their ways, though one was a somewhat markedly composite dog, and the other the heroine of a story.

Of course she did not know that she was a heroine. For Jane was not given to the maidenly day-dreaming common to the average female of seventeen. She was not conscious of having reluctant feet; in fact, her feet were usually fairly itching to try fresh paths. She was enormously interested in her future, but when she peered into it eagerly she never saw rose-lighted castles in the air nor heard the blare of the trumps of Romance. It was the good brown earth, and the humble good brown lives growing out of it that she was minded to explore.

So, being shamelessly unlike other maids, when she saw a young man coming toward her from the opposite direction, her heart did not leap, and her brain did not tingle with the eternal, almost automatic query of unmated youth, "Will it be He?"

Having never thought of herself as a heroine, it had never occurred to her to look for a hero.

He could have been accepted as a very presentable imitation of one, however, this youth who was approaching. He was perhaps a year or two older than herself, quite tall, very fair, and noticeably—a man would have said offensively—good-looking. There was an appealing boyishness about him, something indefinitely gentle and beguiling which Jane felt instinctively though without conscious analysis.

Jab, with a dog's large and comprehensive courtesy to all dog-loving people, pranced up to him, wagging. The boy smiled, patted his head almost shyly, and was about to pass on when a sudden thought appeared to strike him. He stopped.

"Little girl," he said entreatingly, "do you happen to have a pin about you,—several pins?"

Jane stared and chuckled. Being Jane and "queer," she did not in the smallest degree mind being hailed as "Little girl." Her seventeen-year-old dignity was not so easily wounded. She thought it, in fact, rather a joke. As for the unconventional simplicity of the request, it decidedly pleased her. She had with her three pins, which

she promptly produced with a very grave face indeed.

"That's fine!" exclaimed the youth with satisfaction. "Now, if you'll look in my coat pocket please——"

Jane's astonished face made him flush slightly.

"I've twisted my right arm a bit," he explained nervously, "and I can't use it very well. But if you'll look for me, you'll find some sheets of music, —manuscript sheets. They're rather mussed up, but I can show you the way they go. I wish you'd please pin them together."

Jane thus made her initial acquaintance with the helpless male and the artistic temperament at one and the same time. She found that both were as simply exacting and as sublimely trustful in their demands as any two-year-old infant. She never dreamed of refusing the curious favor he asked, but obediently searched his pocket, pulling out sundry crumpled sheets covered with tiny scrawly notes. At the top of one of the pages flashed a familiar name.

"'Otho Lendrick'" she read aloud. "Then you must belong to the hermit on the hill."

He nodded.

"The name isn't really Lendrick," he said,

"it's Lendrach." He gave the last syllable the soft, hoarse German inflection. "Yes, that's grandfather. He is a sort of a hermit, and—have you all the pages together now?"

Then he looked full at her for the first time, and positively jumped.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated. "You—you're grown up, aren't you?"

"Not very!" laughed Jane. "I don't mind being called a little girl one bit. I'm certainly not a young lady. I'm just Jane O'Reilly."

The boy, covered with confusion, pulled off his cap.

"You'll think I meant to be dreadfully cheeky, Miss—Miss O'Reilly," he stammered. "But I truly thought—you—you're so small you know——"

"Now show me how to put these pages together," interrupted Jane, very much as she would have spoken to a small fractious child whose mind she wanted to distract. And Otho Lendrick turned to this with relief. When it was done, and the sheets were duly pinned in their proper sequence, she demanded suddenly:

"How did you hurt your arm?"

This did not seem to be a happy turn to the conversation. With his forehead wrinkled in the

resigned scowl you sometimes see on the face of a troubled little boy, this larger boy explained:

"Some fellows tried to tear up my music, and I had to fight."

Jane glowed. "And you won?" she cried.

"No," said the lad without emotion or bitterness. "I didn't. I got licked;—I always do. Another fellow butted in and saved the manuscript; was very decent of him; he knew, you see, that I was sure to get licked.

Jane surveyed him curiously and compassionately. From Barney O'Reilly she had inherited a fine Irish fighting sense. But she was all woman, and she accordingly switched and adjusted her standards with miraculous speed in order to meet the needs of the child-man who was already worming himself into her interest.

"As long as you fought," she said comfortingly, "it doesn't make any difference whether you were licked or not!"

"Doesn't it, though!" he remarked with faint scorn. "My shoulder hurts like—well, it hurts quite a lot."

Jane felt deeply concerned about the shoulder, and swiftly began on a new series of adjustments in viewpoints.

"Let's sit down a minute," she suggested. "If you've been fighting——"

"I'm not tired," he declared stiffly.

"Of course not!" Jane hastened to agree. "But I am. Jab and I have walked miles——"

"Oh, you live a long way off then?" he said with a gleam of interest.

Jane was saved answering by the appearance of a red touring car which for some reason aroused bitter personal hatred in the breast of Jabberwock. He seemed determined to make the driver ditch his car in avoiding running over him, and even when Jane had picked him up and reproved him, he yapped his reasons for the antipathy which he felt for that particular machine. When the flurry was over, Otho made no further objections to sitting down among the warm-smelling flowers and tendrils and weeds at the roadside. With his child-like directness, and his sudden boyish attack of dignity, Jane found him very appealing; she did not know that his type is one of the most fatal in the world so far as women with the maternal instinct are concerned,—and that is to say most of the women ever born.

Now men, no more than women, are made all on the one pattern and that a cast-iron one fash-

ioned out of traditional masculine stability. Indeed, it is more traditional than it is anything else. For, just as a great many women can be strong and still be womanly, so a few men may possess that gentleness and frailness of fibre generally called feminine, and still have much manliness in their makeup. These men are the poets and artists and dreamers of the world, necessary to the loveliness of life as the birds are necessary, or any other priests of beauty.

Otho Lendrick was of these. He was sensitive as a girl, highly strung, capable of generosity and self-sacrifice, visionary, unpractical, talented, intensely lovable. Other boys at school had called him "Sissy," though he was tall and not ill-proportioned. His big, dark-blue eyes and coppery hair that curled gave him too girlish an aspect for the taste of male Young America. And Otho had spent many painful years in trying to thrash his tormentors. The manly art, however, was as foreign to his nature and capacity as counterpoint and absolute pitch were to theirs, and he got beaten in every fight. Not being a coward, he kept wearily at it, accepting it as one of the essential evils of this trying life. A boy—this general rule he had absorbed from the school code—must

fight. If he fought badly, so much the worse for him. Such things were on the knees of the gods.

Jane had at last decided on what tone to take.

"Why," she suggested practically, "don't you keep out of fights?"

Otho shook his handsome head and sighed in a tired way.

"You don't understand," he said, painstakingly kind. "Girls can't, naturally. But men *have* to fight."

Jane suppressed a smile. He was so mild and young-looking and peaceable that the words sounded infinitely ridiculous. But a little stab of tenderness went through her all at once, and her eyes were quite serious as she ventured:

"But don't you see, you've fought such a lot, nobody can say you're afraid—and that's all men fight for anyhow!" stated our wisdomful Jane.

Otho pondered this. He had supposed that the institution of honourable combat had in it some incentive more noble than the mere maintaining of a reputation. Jane put it in a new light.

"But—if you're right"—he said doubtfully, "men just fight because they're—vain?"

"Sure!" acquiesced Jane cheerfully. "And afraid."

"Afraid!"

"Afraid of being thought cowards." A loyal recollection of her own truculent sire caused her to qualify this ungenerous statement. "I suppose," she conceded, "that *some* of 'em do it because it's the right thing to do, but not many. *You* don't. You do it so they won't call you 'Molly' or something, don't you?"

Otho's sensitive face flushed. "How did you know?" he asked.

Jane felt that she had made a bad break. No child-man likes to be told that he could possibly be called "Molly." She tried to soothe the offended majesty.

"I suppose boys are such brutes that they name anybody 'Molly' if he isn't always scrapping!" she remarked hastily and tactfully. "Stupid, I call it."

It seemed that they had been sitting for hours and hours on that warm, odorous bank beside the road. The afternoon sun beat on their heads and sent its glow through their young veins. Neither boy nor girl was conscious of sex as yet. Otho's mental and artistic development had pushed his animal nature into abeyance. His adolescence was lengthy and untroubled by material urgings.

Jane had literally not thought of such things so far. But they were strongly drawn to each other just the same; very soon they were talking like old friends, while the god in the machine, in the person of Jabberwock, scampered after grasshoppers and elves and turned back occasionally to see how they were making out.

Otho told her about his lonely childhood with his grandfather in the big dreary house on the hill, and her heart ached for him. Old Lendrick was well known as a recluse and eccentric, and the O'Reilly sisters had often been frightened into good behaviour in their babyhood by being warned that the hermit of the hill would get them. He was seldom seen, so popular imagination could have full and lurid play. According to Otho, he was quite rich but refused to let his grandson go away to study music as he wished.

"There isn't the ghost of a reason why he should keep me at home!" the boy declared bitterly. "I'm sure he hates me as much as I hate him. It's just that he doesn't care about things any more, and he doesn't want any one else to. Why, I have to work at my music on the sly. And yet I've an idea he used to be a musician himself. It seems as though he were angry to know any one ever had a

particle of pleasure. He'd keep me from reading if he possibly could, I do believe,—just because he knows I like it.

“What a beastly, disgusting old man!” exclaimed Jane in indignation.

“Rather!” agreed Otho cordially.

Long, long afterward, Jane looked back upon those outpoured confidences of Otho's, and realized that they had been the misleading interpretations and exaggerations of egotistical youth. She had gained then an impression of that unseen grandfather of his which bore a definite family resemblance to the wicked ogre in the fairy stories. She had visualized him as a heartless being, crushing out the boy's hope and life with deliberate cruelty. The house on the hill had seemed to her a Dark Tower no better than a dungeon. Whereas, in reality—but she had far and far to go before she came upon the reality.

She had started to tell her new friend something of herself, but soon had the sense to stop. While he was beautifully polite, he was not a bit interested, and his entire idea of the meaning of conversation was that someone should hang upon his words as though they were the most important things in the world. This was perfectly natural;

to him, he was not only the most important but the only important thing. Jane speedily grasped this and settled down willingly to the rôle of audience. She was learning the ways of men-children very fast.

Not that he wasn't interested in her, he was; but it was only in relation to himself.

"I shall call you Janet," he announced, "because that's what Rochester called Jane Eyre. She was little like you, and—and——"

"Plain," prompted Jane with a twinkling eye. "But do you really feel like 'my beloved master'?"

She looked at his soft blue eyes and fair skin, and thought of Rochester. A mental picture of that muscular and temperamental monster rose fiercely at Otho's side, and she gave an uncontrollable gurgle of laughter.

Otho was wounded, and very soon departed homeward. But they had agreed to meet again in the woods below the hermit's house.

Jane looked after him with a funny, rueful, happy little face. She knew the maternal pang as she remembered that she had not asked him how his wrenched arm was. How dear of him not to have reminded her, when probably he was suffering.

Her bright green eyes were doubly bright with impulsive tears. Jane had found out what she had wanted instinctively ever since she could remember.

She had wanted something to mother.

CHAPTER IV

BEYOND THE SKY LINE

. . . Hopes. and fears that kindle hopes,
An undistinguishable throng,
. . . . Wishes long subdued,
Subdued and cherished long!

SAMUEL T. COLERIDGE.

LITTLE Jane's life was full of interest to her because her rich imagination coloured the whole world,—or, rather, found the colours that already were in the world. But viewed from the more literal viewpoint of most persons, she led an unusually monotonous and dull existence. The O'Reilly strain was an adventurous one, but the Molling Weede atmosphere was an element most antagonistic and discouraging to adventure of any sort. As the Grand Panjandrum and his wife ascended and expanded in fortune, they did not correspondingly ascend and expand in spiritual or mental development. The new friends that they made through their augmented worldly goods

were not any more intellectual than the butcher's wife and the soda-fountain girls of the old days, and not half so good at heart.

Theodosia and Jane had therefore benefited little by the improved fortunes of the family. 'Dosia had gained the most, specifically, for she liked pretty fripperies, and could now afford them, thanks to her stepfather's indulgence. But Jane had really acquired nothing through the increase of income that she would not inevitably have acquired without it,—acquired by the sheer, imperative eagerness of her young mentality. She was a born reader, a born lover of books as of people, a liver of life in its manifold phases and a worshipper of it. She brought to the circumscribed curriculum of the town school a brain so fertile, so compelling, that she found excitement even in those chilly studies,—an achievement somewhat more striking than finding tongues in trees or books in the running brooks.

In the circulating library she had made friends with many books not included in the stiff little lists made out by the teachers for home reading. And she had astonished the librarian,—a studious, fossilized little man who only asked to be per-

mitted to live and die in the odour of print and leather,—by developing a rapturous love for the great humorists of the world. The little old gentleman felt vaguely shocked as he handed her out *Tom Jones* and *Roderick Random*. It was not at all fitting that a young lady should be amused by such robust stuff. It was perhaps extraordinary that he let her have the books at all, but in truth he was barely more sophisticated than Jane herself, and the propriety or impropriety of the books he dispensed never crossed his mind. The displeasing point, to his notion, was that this young creature should like such hearty fun. It was not quite nice for females to enjoy even the classic jesters. It argued something unfeminine in them, since everyone knew that a good laugh was the sworn enemy of womanly sentiment.

Jane, however, read her Sterne and Smollett and Fielding and even her Beaumont and Fletcher, and throve on the fare, seeing no evil in what she read, and rightly interpreting the healthy coarseness of it all into something genuinely clean and funny. Her innocence went utterly unhurt through the ripe gaiety of these giants among mortals, seeing, as they saw, the warm vein of laughter in the grimmest and iciest tragedies of life, just as she

could also descry in their company the shadowy pathos that followed the jolliest jest.

In Otho Lendrick, whom she soon saw almost daily, she found a companion reader who devoured books almost with her voracity, but whose taste had led him into different literary lands. Through him she came to care for poetry and for the romanticists. At first, in her passion of enthusiastic gratitude for the new worlds he had opened to her, she tried to make him free of hers in return. But he disliked realism, was bored by jokes, shrank from the plain speaking of the geniuses who had not time to mince their words, and in all ways was left unmoved by the Comic Muse. Jane tried him hopefully with *Don Quixote* and Smollett's translation of *Ruy Blas*, but he missed the satire and thought the narrative dull, so she gave it up.

But though she could not unlock many doors for him,—not many, at least that he cared to enter,—she herself was not so limited by a narrow taste. Jane wanted to read, and see, and feel, and know, and love everything on earth. Her whole soul flung itself thirstily forward to meet everything that was new. For, without knowing it, she had the explorer's temperament, the eager

pioneer spirit which can never rest entirely satisfied until it has come to some spot beyond the sun.

It was Otho who introduced her to that magician who is wont to pause tantalizingly on the brink of what we conceive to be his most glorious yarn, to say with mocking dismissal: "But that is another story!" Otho worshipped Kipling. It was odd and paradoxical that the visionary boy should have so profound an admiration for the poet who of all other moderns wrote of and for men as they really are and not only as they would dream to be. Undoubtedly it was the splendid clash of his music that filled the lad's heart and fired his sensitive imagination. It is certain that, though he missed a great deal of its elemental force, and polished, stinging, colourful brutality, he loved it and quivered to it in a passion of sympathetic harmony.

And to Jane it was a revelation that left her trembling and cold with excitement. The day on which she first read *The Song of the Dead* was one which she never forgot.

Otho read it with her.

"We were dreamers dreaming greatly in the man-stified town,
We yearned beyond the sky line where the strange roads go down——"

Jane read on in a trance, forgetting everything, until she heard Otho's voice, as though from a far distance.

"The words, Jane!" he stormed rapturously. "The gorgeous, ripping, pounding words of it!"

He repeated, with a musician's phrasing and metric sense:

"On the sand-drift—on the veldt-side—in the fern-scent we lay——"

Can't you hear the cacophony,—all smashing discords, yet worked out into the right chords somehow,—listen to the next part: *that's* the resolution of the dissonance,—

"That our sons might follow after by the bones on the way."

Isn't it superb? Jane,—isn't it superb?"

Jane's own throat was full. That dramatic imagination of hers was immeasurably stirred by this naked, glowing symbolism. With her swift, embracing thought, she saw not only a concrete picture of individual travellers dying uncomplaining and alone in desolate lands; she had the vaster view of the great company of explorers and adventurers and seekers, giving up their lives in soldier fashion that the march of the years might go on

and carry the race upon the tremendous warpath of progress. The very idea caught at her heart. She shut her eyes breathlessly, and saw shadowy hosts of men moving doggedly yet splendidly on to death, that Man might live. The call, "Follow after—follow after," had, to her, a ring as heart-rending and inspiring as the message of Christ upon the cross. These men too were the Redeemers of the world. . . .

She turned instinctively to Otho for sympathy, —Otho who had shown her this new wonder, who must love it even better than she since it had long been familiar to him.

"It's—like seeing the other side—of the sunset"—she said haltingly.

Otho stared.

"What's that?" he said. "Oh, yes,—it's a great idea, of course. But listen to the magnificent trick in that rhythm. See how he's measured it in syllables, so that in the big parts you have all the hard words piled up together like stones, but never once lose the beat of it!"

Jane looked at him curiously, now. She had not lost her own exalted vision, but her human practical sense was interested in the phenomenon of Otho's temperament.

"Otho," she said suddenly, "I believe all you care for is the *sound* of it!"

In Jane these verses, and others even more thrilling, aroused the fine unrest of all great spirits. She began to be conscious, like Gwendolen, of growing pains in her soul. The wings that were sprouting hurt her and made her glad at one and the same second. And she found herself for the first time longing to escape from the Molling Weede environment, into some element where she could stretch herself without tipping over some sordid clutter of perishable and useless trifles,—the appallingly important little things of little lives. As a matter of fact her freedom was already journeying toward her, in a queer and unforeseen disguise.

Mr. Molling Weede disliked dogs. It was, of course, a foregone conclusion that he should. We seldom like those whom we know to be our superiors and before whom we are always at a disadvantage. Just as it is easy to hate people to whom we owe money, and hard to forgive those whom we have wronged, so did Mr. Molling Weede harbour an eternal, festering bitterness toward a race of beings that is naturally and almost universally generous, courteous, and honest. Jabberwock made

Jane's stepfather too acutely conscious of the particular points in which he fell most grievously short, for him to like to see him about. Not, needless to say, that the Grand Panjandrum put this fact into words, even in the obscure recesses of his fat brain. He merely told himself, with the rest of his class and kind, that "dogs were all very well in their place," but that indoors they were a nuisance, always under foot and noisy, and that a man ought to be master in his own home.

Jane and Jab usually took tactful note of Mr. Weede's presence in the house, and avoided it when possible. But the Grand Panjandrum had a way of falling asleep in unexpected corners, which was discomfiting when you came upon him suddenly,—especially if you were a small dog who had, perhaps, been talking very loud indeed about something or other of huge importance.

The climax came when, on one of these occasions, Mr. Molling Weede, rudely aroused and irritable, kicked Jabberwock.

There was a sort of tradition in the household that Jane had inherited her father's fire of temper together with his fire of hair, but as a matter of fact, she seldom displayed it. Lack of sympathy and understanding in those about her had shut her

in upon herself to a large extent, and if she did indulge in rages they were silent ones, behind a masklike little countenance. Today, however, the members of her family were to learn what Jane's temper was really like. Indeed, it is doubtful if they ever, before or after, witnessed anything quite so lurid or spectacular in the way of fury, in her or any one else.

She told Mr. Molling Weede what sort of a man he was, what people said of him, what they even thought of him in secret. She assured him that he only failed to hear these things because some persons were afraid of his well-known spite and malice toward those who did not kowtow to him, and others were silly and soft-hearted enough to still regard him as a human being whose feelings should not be hurt.

"When any one sees you coming," said Jane, with terribly cold young scorn, "they say, 'Look at that fat fool! I wonder what he's been doing to-day?—Bullying his wife, or cheating some decent man who's working for him! Look at the way he walks—wouldn't you think he owned the street? And he's nothing but a joke,—or would be if he weren't such a low brute!'"—"That's the sort of thing they say——"

"Jane!" gasped her mother, horrified. "How dare you!"

Mr. Molling Weede was pale with a ghastly greenish pallor. His big mouth opened and closed like that of a half-dead codfish; there was a real sweat of terror on his dome-like forehead. He was more afraid of Jane at that moment than he had ever been before in all his puerile, sneaking, bullying existence. She, small, white, and determined, stood unmoved with Jabberwock in her arms, and proceeded as though she had not even heard her mother's exclamation.

"There was a bet on among some of the boys once," she said relentlessly. "One of them bet that you could swallow any amount of cheap flattery, and the others took him up, and gave him a test they thought no one could get away with. They bet him that he couldn't go up to you on Main Street and say you looked so smart he wanted the address of your tailor."

Mr. Molling Weede began to get slowly purple. His eyes became suffused.

"Remember it? You were looking particularly funny that day, in a light checked suit, that made you stick out in bulges all over.—Gee! Do you remember it, 'Dosia?—And they swore even you

would see the joke! But the boy was game, and he asked you, and you *fell for it*. You were as pleased as Punch, and simply *waddled* with pride! The boy made ten dollars on that, and I bet it was the only real good you ever did any one in your life."

"Leave the room!" wheezed Mr. Weede.

"I'm going,—don't worry. I'm feeling quite kindly to you, now that I've told you how ridiculous you are, and I know it makes you unhappy to look at me!"

She walked out, hugging Jab. On the back piazza she stood still a moment, unreasonable tears running down her face. She was not in the least sorry for having spoken, but she felt miserable. It was awful to Jane to hurt anything, and she knew that there is no hurt more exquisite than injured vanity. Any one can bear to be considered a villain,—but not a joke! Nevertheless the Pandrum deserved all he got and more.

"Oh, Jennie!"

'Dosa was at her side, her pretty face quite scared, and her voice only a whisper.

"Jennie, how could you? It—it was so *horrid*! Not even ladylike!—"

"I know," said Jane, brusquely. "But you

can't clean streets with blotting paper, nor kill pigs with silver butter knives."

Leaving Theodosia still further shocked by her vulgarity, she went off, carrying Jabberwock. Her face was turned toward the wooded hill where she was due to meet Otho that afternoon.

CHAPTER V

THE FLITTING

Come, choose your road and away, my lad,
Come, choose your road and away!
We'll out of the town by the road's bright crown,
As it dips to the sapphire day!
All roads may meet at the world's end . . .

ALFRED NOYES.

WHEN she came near that part of the wooded hill where she was wont to meet Otho, she heard the sound of his violin, and moved more softly. The boy could play with a really lovely touch, though it was delicate rather than tender. His training had been but rudimentary, but the "fiddler's gift" was born in him; his fingers were pre-ordained to the trick of making sweet sounds. Jane loved his playing, and encouraged it, for she not only looked to a day when he would do great things with it, but knew that it always helped him vastly. Her keen intuitions told her that music would always be Otho's best safety valve. One day it would be a great god to him, a deity to be

served with prayer and fasting; for the time being it was a very staunch guardian, soothing his boyish fits of anger and depression, and reconciling him with life and living as no mere human might hope or dare to do. How often she envied him,—him, then, and others later on,—for the outlet which they had for their emotions in these creative channels. Surely they had been opened for them by the gods,—who do seem at times a bit given to despotic partiality.

Today the music was restless and ragged,—one of his own compositions, she felt sure; an immature, wailing thing, with insecure modulations and a stubbornly eccentric rhythm. Clearly he was playing off some particularly black time.

She put Jab down, and sat down herself on a big moss-covered stone. The little dog had not been really hurt by the Grand Panjandrum, but he was still subdued by the domestic storm to which his sensitive makeup had responded so quiveringly. He sat quietly on the edge of his lady's skirt, and he too listened to the violin strains with studious attention and reverential seriousness.

The woods were September woods now, wearing a new dress and a mood as new. With nature's perversity, their spirit was today as sad as their

trappings were gay. An aching pathos was mixed with the glowing beauty, and a misty sorrow with the purple shadows that lay in such rich splashes across the warm autumnal sunshine. For every reddened or gilded leaf there was a new note of pain in the quiet air of the grove. And Otho's music, crude and imperfect as it was, yet fitted in almost too poignantly to the atmosphere of the season and the hour. The violin's unhappy theme was the theme of the fall wind that spoke softly and bitterly among the branches; the rhythm was that of the falling leaves, bright as jewels, which seemed scattered upon the earth by unseen hands, with gestures full of bravado and a freakish despair.

Something of all this was strong though unworded in Jane's mind as she sat looking at the ceaseless flicker of dying colour, and listening to the petulant music. . . .

And then Jabberwock, whose heart, too, was full to overflowing, began to howl.

He lifted up his slender nose till it pointed to the high heavens, and wailed his sympathy with the decaying glory of the earth. He set his small paws firmly in the moss, and, breathing deeply, voiced the lament of all nature as only a young,

emotional dog has the nerve, the earnestness, and the lung power to do.

The violin stopped abruptly, and Jab sat wailing alone, with tight-closed eyes. For one dazed moment, Jane sat and looked at him, then she collapsed. . . .

"I think it's rather beastly of you to laugh!" said Otho, crossly reproachful as he joined her. "And I should have thought you could have kept him quiet too, if you had wanted to."

"My dearest boy!" almost wept Jane, weak from laughter, as she soothed Jab—who was even more offended than Otho by the deadly insult of her levity—"if I had known he was going to try to sing second like that I'd have muzzled him,—truly I would! But who could have expected it, I ask you? He hardly ever howls. I suppose the time and the place were too much for him—oh, Otho, it *was* funny! And you're funniest of all, looking so deadly sober! Sit down, and let's forget the concert—" She choked again. "Jabberwock, darling," she said, tenderly, "run away and find a sympathetic squirrel. No one loves you but me round here!"

Jane had come to the wood burning with resentment, pain, and a womanish longing to be com-

forted. She felt hurt and bruised to an unwonted degree. She knew that, now that she had been brought into an open row with the Grand Pandrum, she would be held in disgrace for ever and a day. It would be an uncomfortable way to live, and she was inclined to dread it. But she saw almost instantly that Otho was too concerned with his own troubles to give hers a second thought. She resolutely subdued herself, and tucked it away out of sight, where it could not interfere with his complete comfort, and prepared to listen to his newest grievances. She had only one wistful regret; that Otho could never laugh with her at the sad and silly things of life. It would have made it so much easier for them both!

"It's no use, Jane!" he burst out, all at once. "I can't stand it; I simply can't!"

His boyish face was working wretchedly. He opened and closed his long sensitive fingers in a convulsive way, as though he were suffering physical pain. Jane's heart went out to him, in absolute forgetfulness of herself.

"I—I'm going to run away!" said Otho, with a sort of sullen exultation in having made up his mind at last.

Jane jumped; for just a second she felt shocked,

so strongly is the conservative streak developed in girls. Then she shook the shock off very much as Jab would shake encumbering raindrops. After all, why not? He was utterly unhappy at home; he would probably do better anywhere else on earth. Jane, thinking it over soberly, could not see any particular reason why Otho should not run away. Of course, this point of view was rather mad, but it is a fact that her only regret, on hearing of his determination, was that she could not go with him.

Otho, with the irrational impatience of his temperament, could not possibly wait, now that his decision had been made. He must run away now—this minute. He yielded to Jane's objections, however, and agreed to endure inaction until that evening. She promised to meet him at the crossroads leading to the station that night at eight o'clock,—to say good-bye.

Jane walked home slowly, trying to grasp the fact of this swiftly approaching bereavement. Otho meant more to her than anything had ever meant yet, except Jab. (She still felt obliged to put Jab first.) How was she going to get on without him?

She braced herself and threw up her head, with

a shrewd inkling that she would have troubles of her own when she reached the house. The inkling could hardly have been better justified.

Having fed Jab discreetly at the kitchen door, she shut him into the woodshed with a whispered word of endearing encouragement, and marched into the house.

The Molling Weedes and Theodosia were sitting in more than human grandeur in the dining-room, with their evening meal spread before them. They did not seem to be enjoying it, however. Mrs. Weede was crying as usual, and 'Dosia looked frightened and miserable. The Panjandrum flushed venomously at sight of Jane, but no one greeted her as she took her seat at the table and began to eat.

After a short silence her stepfather spoke in majestic accents:

“Show her her aunt’s letter!”

Jane looked up from her plate, and Mrs. Molling Weede with a trembling hand pushed a sheet of note-paper across the table to her youngest daughter.

Jane took it, and, seeing the close, painstaking handwriting, smiled. It was from Aunt Seraphina, her mother’s sister, who kept a boarding house in

New York and wrote them stern letters once in every two years, lecturing them on the sin in which they were probably living. As she had seen none of them for over a decade, her conviction concerning their depravity was necessarily problematical, but she clung to it, with a truly impressive persistence.

"My dear Janey," the letter began.

Jane was conscious of a faint sense of shock as she glanced at her mother and tried to reconcile her with this diminutive. More than ever was she herself resolved never to permit any dressing up of her own uncompromisingly ugly little name. It was but a slight cross to carry an appellation too old and sober for one's youth; conceive, however, the ludicrous ghastliness of finding oneself saddled with an over-juvenile nickname in one's ungraceful middle age.

MY DEAR JANEY:

I do not know in what state of grace this finds you, —I am not concerned with fleshly matters, so I do not enquire concerning your bodily health,—but I have no doubt that you still travel through a vale of sin. I still pray for you, remembering that you refused to join the one true church, at the time that you married that dissolute infidel O'Reilly. Your second husband is, I hope, better. Your girls, brought up, I suppose,

as sinners before God and man, are old enough to be doing something useful. I know well enough that you cannot teach them that. You always were the most helpless idiot that ever stepped. I am getting on, and find my boarding house something of a trouble. If you want to send one of your daughters on to me, I will let her learn to do hard work and teach her the Christian doctrines. I will charge nothing for her board.

Your affectionate sister,
SERAPHINA RIGBY.

Jane burst out laughing. "Well," she cried, "I certainly must say that it's generous of her to charge nothing for letting us work!—and it must be a splendid thing for a boarding-house keeper not to be concerned in fleshly matters!"

She glanced up, and saw that a chill and ominous attention was being given her. "What's the matter?" she said.

Theodosia's pretty face began to twitch with unhappiness. "Oh, Jennie!" she whimpered.

Jane looked from one to the other. Then an inspiration came to her.

"Are you thinking of sending one of us?" she asked. And all at once she knew it must be so, and went on very quickly: "Oh, of course! I—it was stupid of me not to have seen it before!

You want me to go to Aunt Seraphina, don't you?"

Her mother only sobbed in answer, but Mr. Molling Weede took an obvious satisfaction in stating stentoriously:

"A severe and Christian household where you will have to toil will be the kindest fate for one of your evil temper and unchastened spirit."

"It's settled then," said Jane. "When am I to go?"

"The sooner the better," said the Grand Panjandrum.

"Quite so," said Jane. "I was merely asking about trains."

"The train leaves at eight tomorrow morning," said 'Dosia, choking back a sob."

But Mr. Molling Weede was keener than that. "There is a sleeper tonight," he said, "at a quarter past nine."

"Thanks!" she said. "I had forgotten. I'll take that, of course. Nine fifteen, you said? That's fine. 'Dosia'll help me pack."

She stood up and remained motionless a moment, holding on to the back of her chair.

"It's a great scheme, mother," she said, after a while, and she spoke very gently. "You mustn't

worry; everything'll be all right. You'll get on better after I'm gone. I hope,"—she looked brazenly at Mr. Weede,—“I hope that he'll be have half way decently to you!”

At sight of the large, helpless woman, she felt a rush of inconsequent tears to her eyes. Poor thing,—oh, poor thing. She went out of the room blindly.

She was startled to feel a hand squeezing hers. 'Dositia's face was at her shoulder, puckered distressedly.

“I wish you weren't going, Jennie!” she whispered impulsively. For once Jane did not resent the “Jennie”; her heart warmed to her sister. She squeezed her hand in return, as they went up the stairs together.

In their bedroom,—the room which they had shared since babyhood,—Theodosia looked at her with a vague envy.

“Aren't you sort of afraid, going off to New York alone?” she asked in a hushed voice.

The pupils of Jane's green eyes dilated blackly until they looked like pools of ink.

“Afraid? No, it's fun!” she answered, and there was a catch in her breath.

“But maybe Aunt Seraphina won't be fun!”

Theodosia suggested. "In her letters she sounds like a horror, doesn't she?"

Jane laughed aloud, a laugh of excitement and adventure.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed. "*You don't suppose for one minute that I'm going to stay with Aunt Seraphina, do you?*"

CHAPTER VI

UNDER THE MOON

Camerado, I will give you my hand!
I give you my love more precious than money,
Will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

WALT WHITMAN.

JANE's small stock of belongings went easily into the big straw suit-case which had been stored in the attic since her mother's first wedding trip. It was a very ugly, very respectable-looking receptacle, and Jane grimaced at sight of it, but it was strong and capacious and in Mrs. Molling Weede's opinion quite good enough, if not too good.

'Dosia was so overwhelmed by her sister's audacious plans for emancipation that she was even less useful than usual in helping her pack. She sat on the edge of the bed, for the most part, and asked palpitating questions.

Jane, however, was not communicative. Though she did not really believe Theodosia would betray her, she was not minded to push her sisterly

loyalty too far. Moreover, her schemes were still somewhat visionary even to herself.

When she was ready, she went downstairs to say good-bye to her mother, and to receive twenty-five dollars and a severe blessing from the Grand Panjandrum. She did not soon forget the picture of that chilly untidy dining-room where the two still sat. Her mother had dried her eyes and received her farewell kiss without warmth.

"Good-bye, mamma. Good-bye, Mr. Weede."

"Theodosia," said Mr. Molling Weede, "you will purchase your sister's ticket, and see her safe upon the train. I depend upon you."

"Yes, papa," said Theodosia, in a nervous voice.

Jane's lips twitched with a suppressed grin. "Don't be afraid!" she could not help saying, "I'm not coming back."

As she left the room, she was rather sorry that her parting words in her old home should have been in just that tone.

Outside the house in the street, the girls paused and looked at each other.

"Well," said Jane, with a smile that had become a bit shaky, "*that's* over! Come on, 'Dosa, I want to get Jab."

"You aren't taking that dog!"

"What did you suppose I was going to do with him? Leave him to be a comfort to Mr. Molling Weede?"

She went around the corner of the house, and 'Dosia, faintly protesting and with an apprehensive eye upon the lighted window of the dining-room, followed her. By the time the elder girl had reached the back of the house, Jane had let Jabberwock out of the woodshed, and he was pantingly awaiting further instructions. None knew better than Jab that there were unusual doings afoot, and he was ready for anything.

"Now run along, 'Dosia," said Jane, who had found a basket somewhere and was turning it into a travelling conveyance for Jab with a piece of old blanket. "There's heaps of time until the train goes, but I've got things to do, and you want to be able to say you don't know what became of me. Say I gave you the slip or something."

"You aren't going to the train?" faltered Theodosia.

"Not just yet. Go and visit some one till after train time."

She put down the suit-case and basket and kissed her sister with tenderness. "Good-bye, 'Dosia!"

she said, weakly. "Don't quite forget me, dear old girl!"

"Oh, Jane," whispered 'Dosia, "I—I think I'm wicked to let you go like this."

"You'd be ever so much wickeder not to. If I stayed I'd make no end of bother. What's that?"

A piercing whistle sounded from the front of the house. It was executing the imploring air of "I'm waiting, honey, waiting long for you," and Theodosia, listening, hung her head. In the moon-shot dusk of early evening her sister could see her give a characteristic little wriggle of embarrassment.

"It's—I think it's Bert Matthews," she murmured. "He said he might come round tonight. You'd better go on, Jane."

"I see!" said Jane, beginning to understand her sister's sweet willingness to see her off, and her half-guilty acquiescence in Jane's plan for departing alone. Bert Matthews was 'Dosia's most ardent admirer, and, as his father was a rich grocer, he was encouraged by the Molling Weedes.

"I'll run along, then," Jane said. "Good-bye again, dear. Have a nice evening. Come, Jab!"

She whistled softly and hurried off with the

suit-case and the basket. At the gate of the back yard she turned and looked back once. The small, cheerfully lighted house and the dark, familiar little kitchen porch looked utterly strange to her, as well-known spots always do when seen for the last time. Even the chicken coops looked different, and the very pump seemed to have a lonely expression. She giggled through tears as this foolish fancy came to her. She had never felt particularly attached to the place where she had lived for seventeen years; but perhaps the plant does not feel consciously attached to its patch of ground either. It is only when the roots are pulled up that it begins to hurt.

Jane turned away and went swiftly across the silvered meadowland and onto the road that led to the crossways. It was a beautiful bright windy night, with the moon positively soaring on high, and, for those who had eyes to see, a score or so of white witches riding their broomsticks. As Jane stood for a moment looking up the road her shadow lay black before her on the shining way. It looked like a dark finger pointing, yet she did not even ask herself to what it pointed. She felt too excited to think.

She walked on quickly in the September moon-

light. And Jab went gambolling before her, his shadow that of a diminutive gargoyle, but his heart as stout as a paladin's.

She found Otho already restlessly pacing up and down across the patches of light and shade cast by the wayside trees.

"Bless the boy!" was her greeting. "Can't he keep still for a second? I'm not late."

Otho wheeled and saw her standing there, more grown up than usual in her hat and coat, and with her arms full.

"What's that for?" he demanded, staring at the virtuous-looking suit-case.

Jane giggled.

"Guess!" she replied, feeling suddenly impish and irresponsible. "Take care, Otho! You're going to be horrified!"

"Well, if you have robbed any one, and are trying to get the stuff away,"—he began, as facetiously as he knew how.

"Worse than that!—Dear me, how fixed-up you look, Otho. And what a magnificent bag! And your violin in a case and everything! I never knew what a grand person you were. I thought I looked rather nice myself till I saw you, but now I suppose you'll be ashamed of me!"

"Jane, don't be silly!" Otho's sense of humour was not capable of very prolonged flights. Life was real, life was earnest, to him—especially life as it concerned him. "What are you carrying those absurd baskets for anyway?"

"I'm going to run away with you," said Jane, in a calm and offhand manner, but a profound appreciation of the dramatic quality of the announcement. Then she giggled again, for, dramatic or not, it *was* funny to have to inform any one of such a fact.

But Otho did not find it at all funny.

"I wish you would talk sensibly just once in a while," he told her severely. "What do you really mean?"

"Just that. You are going to run away from your grandfather, and I am going with you. Do be nice about it, Otho; you can't help yourself anyway."

"Jane, go home this minute!"

"I can't. I'm turned out!"

"Turned—" His brain reeled. *What* did it all mean?

"They don't want me at home any more," Jane explained unemotionally. It did not strike her as very peculiar that this should be so.

"But they can't want you to go off like this,—with——"

"Bless you, no! They are sending me to Aunt Seraphina for safe keeping."

Otho breathed again. "Oh, I see! But you said——"

"My dear boy, they are sending me to Aunt Seraphina, but I'm not going near her. As I told you, I am going with you. You can't stop me!"

"Indeed I can! I can take you back myself, and tell them——"

"Well, you won't."

"Why not?" he cried irritably. "I certainly can and w——"

"You won't because if you did that you'd have to give up your own running away scheme for now, and nothing would make you do that,—not even the bother of taking me along."

This was entirely true, and Otho was too thoroughly selfish even to resent the merciless thrust at his selfishness.

"But Jane, it wouldn't be proper!" he protested feebly.

And though he himself felt this to be an inept and futile objection, where a girl like Jane was concerned, it had a surprising effect upon her. It

actually astounded and disconcerted this terrible little person, for with all her good sense this aspect of the matter had never crossed her mind. Propriety was a word so unmeaning in her vocabulary, so unconnected with any analogy or association of ideas, that Otho's use of it was quite a shock. Our wise Jane, versed beyond her years in so many of the vagaries and limitations of humans, sensitive as an aspen to the winds of temperament and of temper among which she lived, was yet an utter child in regard to the weighty ordinances of convention.

"Proper!" she repeated blankly. "Why shouldn't it be proper? And what does it matter anyway?"

Otho made a last struggle. "It wouldn't be proper because—because you're not married to me," he said with as much dignity as he could muster. His face was darkly flushed in the moonlight. He was, after all, only a boy, almost as undeveloped emotionally as Jane.

"I should say not!" gasped Jane, and burst out laughing. "Oh, Otho, what a ridiculous idea!" she cried gaily. "As though *we could* be married, you silly boy!"

"Well," said Otho, rather sulkily, "that's the

only way a girl and a—a fellow can run away together." He had wanted to say "a girl and a man," but he was afraid Jane would laugh at him.

As a matter of fact, she laughed anyway. "You sound as though we were 'keeping company,' like 'Dosia and that Matthews boy," she said. "Why, we never could be like that! I saw him *kiss* her once!" And again she laughed.

Now it is a nice little paradox that the human male will hold a thing in supreme scorn only until it is scorned by some one else; then, nine times out of ten, he will champion it.

The thought of anything bordering on romance with Jane had seemed to Otho absurd until he noted the quite honest derision that it aroused in her. Then, and then only, his masculine egotism stirred truculently, and for the first time he regarded his small comrade with the speculative eye of the predatory male. Not, be it understood, that the boy had a single idea in his clean brain that bore any relation to material desire. He was only considering the possibility of a sweetheart. It is true that, so far, a sweetheart meant little more to him than a good friend with a small sentimental aura and a large placard signifying his personal possession, but the new idea was sufficiently in-

teresting to make him flush more deeply than ever, and say a bit awkwardly:

"I—I don't believe I should mind, Jane!"

"Mind what?" she demanded, surprised into gravity.

"Kissing you Nor, by Jove, I wouldn't mind marrying you, either!" exclaimed Otho in a reckless burst. It seemed quite exciting to say it. He had forgotten his recent stern dictums on propriety, had even forgotten the whole scheme of running away.

Jane remained serious longer than he had expected. In the moonlight her small face was very white, and her eyes very dark. The pallid radiance from the sky drained the colour from her till she looked like a little silver wraith. And her lips did not smile at all.

Otho felt a queer lump in his throat. He had spoken boyishly, impulsively, with a certain theatrical pleasure in what he said. As he looked at little Jane it was different somehow. For still Jane did not laugh, and she was oddly quiet, staring at him with eyes which he could hardly believe had ever been green. The boy felt a little frightened and curiously touched. He had a dim notion that his mother might have looked at him like

that, silently, gravely,—and yes, very tenderly; questioning him, appraising him, and caring for him very much indeed. He felt ridiculously small and young, and Jane was suddenly twice his age.

“Jane!” he whispered at last.

Jane smiled softly.

“I truly don’t think it would be such a bad idea,” she said, as though she were thinking aloud.

“You need some one to look after you, and—and I shall *love* to look after you, Otho,” she finished sweetly.

Otho was vaguely abashed, even more vaguely disappointed. It wasn’t very romantic, and it wasn’t very comforting to his manly pride, this fashion of being accepted. But he was fond of Jane, and grateful for something big, and warm, and dependable which he felt in her.

“We shan’t be able to get married here,” he found himself saying, as though it had all been settled. “People know us, and we’re not of age. We’ll have to wait until we get to New York.”

“And *then* we’ll have a lot of bother!” said Jane, wrinkling her forehead. “We don’t either of us look very old!—For that matter,” she added with a grin, “we aren’t very old,—not nearly old enough to be married, really! We’ll just have to

wait and see, Otho. There's no hurry, anyway," ended Jane tranquilly.

Otho thought again of propriety. He was proud of thinking of it; perhaps he was developing an incipient sense of responsibility.

"I ought not to let you do this, Jane," he faltered. "I ought to take better care of you."

Jane smiled divinely in the moonlight.

"Don't be a goose!" she said. "I'm going to do the taking care,—of both of us! Come on, Otho, it's time to start for the train."

Otho capitulated. Then he surprised himself as well as Jane, very much indeed.

"May I—kiss you, Jane?" he asked, not very steadily.

Jane hesitated, but it was from astonishment and not from maidenly shyness. In her innocent heart there was no glimmer of self-consciousness, nor of the instinctive hot shrinking that is the first pulse of passion.

"Why, of course, Otho, dear," she said, quite tenderly and happily, and raised her lips to his.

If they had been a little older they would have known by that first kiss that they were not in love.

It did, however, wake something in Otho of which he had not before been conscious,—sex.

He had never kissed a girl before, and, in spite of his clean living and untroubled senses, he was a youth and normal. He trembled as he drew back from Jane's gentle kiss. And all the manhood in him warned him suddenly that it was not safe to let her go with him, that he should in honour protect her against his springing blood and her own utter confidence. But that weakness of strain which made him lovable, made him also more than a little selfish, and more than ever he knew that he wanted Jane with him.

He deliberately tried not to analyze that want more deeply, but he was for some reason ashamed to look at her as he bent to pick up the bags.

"There—there's a strap that's unfastened," he muttered.

"Let me help you," said Jane, entirely ignorant of his mood. "How cold your hands are, Otho! Let's hurry on. Jab—Jab!"

The three wanderers started together along the high road, under the moon.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRAIN FOR NEW YORK

There's sorrow enough in the natural way
From men and women to fill our day;
But when we are certain of sorrow in store,
Why do we always arrange for more?
Brothers and sisters, I bid you beware
Of giving your heart to a dog to tear.

RUDYARD KIPLING.

It was the poor little Jabberwock's fault that they did not go to New York after all.

As a matter of fact, they would have had no little difficulty in taking him on a sleeper in any case, but Jane did not know that, and Otho characteristically never gave it a thought. The problem of his transportation, however, was solved for them before it was presented.

They had some minutes to wait for the New York train when they reached the station. The night was growing chilly, and Jane was restless, so while Otho bought the tickets and felt indescribably masterful and authoritative, she paced

up and down the platform, under the sickly yellow lights, and breathed the cinder-laden air with a sense of incongruity in that this smoky-smelling atmosphere should be the breath of freedom!

She had rashly let Jab out of his basket for a run, and he trotted beside her, turning up an anxious little muzzle now and again to ask for enlightenment as to the next move. He was not seriously worried: he knew that she could make no mistakes. But he was concerned lest something momentous should happen when he was not prepared for it. So he watched her with strained attention.

Jane carried with her all through life a motley assortment of mental pictures. Her memory was retentive and photographic, and every scene stamped upon its negative had the delicate vividness of detail found in an unusually clear snapshot. Many persons have good memories, logical memories, imaginative memories, all coloured to a more or less degree by the conditions under which they are exercised. But Jane really remembered things as they were. When she closed her eyes and recalled an incident, she could see the place where it had occurred almost as plainly as she had seen it at the time. There was no effort of the brain required; the scene was there for her to reconsider at her

leisure. She would have made a remarkable witness,—except that, since the hardest thing to credit is the truth, no one would have believed in the uncanny accuracy of her impressions.

When, in after years, Jane thought of the night she ran away, she had only to put her hand before her eyes, and her remembrance sketched for her again the minutiae of that dingy station. She again saw the people waiting with the ready-to-travel faces that are so strained and so prematurely tired. There was a woman with two small children and a great number of bundles. A certain heavy slackness about her reminded Jane of her own mother, but there was more humanity in the stranger's eyes; she looked like a mother. The children were already crying with fretful fatigue, and one could imagine what sort of night lay before the woman.

There was a young drummer rolling cigarettes and studying a time-table at one and the same time, with a practised dexterity almost resembling sleight of hand. He was repulsively pale and unhealthily puffy, but his capable and self-confident air was obscurely fascinating. There was a little knot of people sitting on suit-cases and grips at the far end of the platform.

"That's the troupe that played here last night," Jane heard one man say to another, and she looked at them with curiosity. She had never seen any-one connected with the stage before. From a distance they looked a good deal like other people, she decided. But when she remembered them she remembered that they had looked more at home on the gusty platform than other travellers. She remembered the almost easy way in which they balanced themselves on their pieces of luggage under the distant light.

She remembered that one of the station lamps was hung crooked and wobbled in a seasick way. A man in shirt sleeves, with an official cap on the back of his head and a pencil behind his ear, was chalking something up on a blackboard. From inside the station came the impatient clatter of the telegraph. Two engines seemed to be playing some monstrous sort of chess game on the tracks in front, advancing and retreating in a series of mysterious and apparently interminable moves.

She did not know that she herself was an object of some curiosity and interest as she trotted up and down with her small dog. There was something quaint and arresting in Jane's appearance; she was so little and yet so self-possessed, so

shabbily dressed yet so graceful in movement, so pale and unbeautiful of feature, yet so elusively attractive.

A big baggage truck, laden with trunks, came rumbling down the length of the platform. There was a small teetering portmanteau balanced on the top of the pile, and Jane watched expectantly to see it fall off.

But she never knew whether it fell off or not. For the truck swerved drunkenly and top-heavily, and caught Jab before he could get out of the way. Thus did he pay dearly for the unwonted pre-occupation which kept him watching his mistress instead of taking care of himself.

The baggage man was tired and in a hurry, and with a growl of casual regret passed perspiring on his way.

Jane knelt on the platform holding Jab in her arms, his whines of agony wringing her heart more poignantly than any pain of her own could have wrung it.

"Oh, Otho, come and see what is the matter with him—help me!" she called. "Oh, you don't think he's hurt enough to die, do you? Otho,—Otho!"

Otho came, very pale and shrinking. He

stooped over Jab's racked little body, and then drew back shivering.

"I—I can't touch him!" he muttered. "Jane, you *know* I can't stand seeing things suffer! Don't ask me to, for God's sake!"

Jane's eyes flashed up at him in pain and indignation; and then a very old, weary, wise look came into them. If she cared for Otho, she must care for him as he was, with all his limitations. If the person you loved happened to be a coward, then you just had to make up your mind to love a coward. You didn't ask people to change the colour of their eyes nor the shape of their noses.

She said quietly:

"All right. Go away where his crying won't make you sick. I'll look after him. Oh, Jab, my poor little darling baby dog! What can I do to help you?"

Jab cuddled his suffering head into the loving hand of his All-The-World, and tried hard not to whimper. He was a brave little dog, but when Jane gently felt his legs, he shrieked with anguish. But he did not struggle; only pressed closer against her as he moaned, as hurt dogs have a heart-breaking way of doing.

Jane was crying, unconsciously but in torrents.

She was utterly oblivious to the sights and sounds about her. She did not know even that a train had come and gone, nor that some one had approached with quick and heavy steps and stood beside her.

"What's the matter? Little chap smashed up?"

The words, roughly but not unkindly spoken, made her look up gratefully. She saw a broad-shouldered, thickset young man of medium height, with a dark, rather ill-natured face, and an air of rude authority. He was handsome in a heavy, deeply lined way, and his brown eyes were keen and intelligent. But there was something ruthless and repellent about his personality,—something which struck the observer the more disagreeably in a man so young. He could not have been more than twenty-three or four, yet already he bore the scars of a hard life lived hard.

So it was that Jane first came face to face with Tom Brainerd.

"He's hurt," she said, choking with sobs. "A man pushed a trunk thing over him. I think his leg is broken."

"Let's have a look," said the young man, squatting down beside her with the swift lithe movement of the athlete. A station lamp showed Jane his

strong jaw only a foot away from her face. He was oppressively powerful she thought, but she noticed that he touched Jab as carefully and tenderly as she touched him herself.

"You love dogs," she said.

He nodded. "I never met any dog that wasn't better than any man,—or woman either," he declared gruffly. Then he said nothing more till he had finished his examination.

"Broken left hind leg," he announced. "'You'd better carry him home and have some good vet. fix him up."

Which added the final touch to Jane's wretchedness. For how could she take Jab home to the Molling Weede household? If Jab was unwelcome well, he would be doubly unwelcome ill. She had no faith in her stepfather's mercy, and she knew that her mother would not stand by her for a minute. Her sister Theodosia had a tender heart where animals were concerned, but she would be too afraid of the powers in authority to do anything but say she was sorry. Jane felt that it would have been better for her poor little friend to have been killed outright. But Barney O'Reilly's daughter was, after all, a fighter (her pacific diatribes to Otho notwithstanding), and she set her teeth in

the determination to take care of Jab in some way though the heavens should fall in the process.

"Can he travel?" she demanded of the strange young man, as she might have questioned an eminent specialist in regard to a valuable citizen. The young man gave her a smile which had the effect of being rusty, as from habitual disuse.

"I guess I could get him in some sort of shape," he said. "The jolting won't be good for him, but we'll do what we can. Starting soon?"

"On the sleeper to New York."

But it was Otho's voice that answered this,—it was rather a cross voice too:

"The train left five minutes ago!"

"Oh, Otho!" Jane's cup of sorrow was filled to overflowing. She had a generous impulse of gratitude: "And you wouldn't leave Jab and me! That was splendid of you, Otho!"

Full early was Jane learning to praise the good points of her child man and to forget the bad ones.

Otho breathed with a certain added self-respect. He reflected that it had been rather decent of him to let that train go out rather than desert Jane. And for a dog, too! Otho really liked dogs, but he was too much of a dyed-in-the-wool egotist

not to feel that he had been just a bit noble in not resenting Jane's putting Jab's interests before his.

"Oh, we can get another train all right," he said, trying to sound offhand.

"But what are we going to do with Jab?" said Jane.

She was not at all concerned at that moment as to their destination. She wanted to get away somewhere; still more she wanted to get Otho away; and she very mightily wanted to get Jab somewhere where he could be cared for. Beyond this her desires did not reach nor become specific. As she knelt, and scowled meditatively, and cuddled her patient, she gradually became conscious of the close scrutiny of the rough but good-looking young man who was so gentle with animals. He was looking from her to Otho and back again with an amused but puzzled expression—an expression which almost imperceptibly darkened each time his gaze encountered Otho.

"What's the idea?" he asked at last, in the direct way which bespeaks the nature unaccustomed to troubling itself with formalities. "Are you two together?"

Again the searching look, which, as Jane saw

with some wonder, seemed to disturb Otho. After fidgeting a moment he burst out with, "We are brother and sister!"

Otho felt this to be an inspiration, but he spoke with a stiffness which was not convincing. In fact his tone so lacked the ring of truth that the dark young man laughed out loudly and not very kindly. Otho flushed, and Jane frowned with vexation and bewilderment.

"Otho!" she cried, "why do you tell such a silly lie? We aren't a *bit* brother and sister, and this man knows it perfectly well." She turned to the stranger frankly. "We're going to be married," she explained with beautiful finality and simplicity. "Neither of our families has any use for us, and we're going away together."

"And does your family know you're going?" asked the dark young man of Jane. He did not seem interested in Otho.

"Oh, yes," said Jane with sincerity.

The young man stared. He had to believe Jane; no one could help it; but it did sound a little mad. He could only imagine a youthful romance which had led to a stormy break with parental authority. Obviously this queer little girl had been turned out by her people. Being a bit too well acquainted

with the ways of the world, Tom Brainerd put his own construction upon the situation. And being very much a man he viewed Otho with a contempt commensurate with the interest he felt in Jane.

He had no scruples, moral, conventional, or otherwise, and he always did what he pleased. Jane was, of course, absurdly young, but he argued that she must "know her way about," as he crudely expressed it to himself, to have gotten into such a doubtful position at all.

"Do you have to go to New York?" he asked, again glancing from one to the other, but with a more inscrutable expression this time. As he spoke, he again stooped to pat Jab; he cared passionately for dogs. He rose from the caress, and his eyes were still fixed upon Jane.

"Why, no," she answered him readily enough. "It doesn't make any particular difference where we go!"

"Don't be a fool, Jane!" exclaimed Otho angrily. "You talk as though we were tramps!"

"Well," said Jane with a woeful little giggle, "isn't that just what we are?"

With the prospect of having Jab cared for, her sense of humour, albeit somewhat battered, was returning to her. The strange young man chuckled

suddenly, and then stopped chuckling just as suddenly. He had caught sight of Otho's violin.

"Do you play?" he demanded quickly.

"A little," assented Otho sullenly.

"And you?"—to Jane. "What can you do?—Sing?—Play?—Act?—Dance?—"

"I can dance," said Jane wonderingly.

He looked her over sharply.

"Wait here a moment," he commanded, and tramped off down the platform.

"You've no business talking to strange men like that!" declared Otho, much ruffled. He had not been pleased with the way the dark young man had looked at him.

"He isn't strange," said Jane, making this extraordinary statement in a tone of surprise. "He's going to take care of Jab."

Otho was silent, recalling the fact that, on his part, he had most distinctly not taken care of Jab! The little dog was quieter now, for Jane was holding him quite still. She waited prayerfully for the return of the stranger who was not a stranger.

She had not long to wait. He came back almost immediately with a thin pale man with grizzled hair and washed-out eyes. This second individual asked a great number of questions which Jane

answered for herself and Otho without any very clear comprehension of their import. The dark young man meanwhile squatted beside her on the platform and worked over Jab. A little whimpering scream from the dog as his leg was set so distracted her attention that she had only a dim idea of what she was saying, and Otho, looking rather green, had retired out of reach of the sound of Jab's pain.

"Jab, darling, be still," moaned Jane, "it's almost over—just a moment more!—Yes, we're going to New York—at least we were, but Jab got hurt and we missed the train. Yes, Otho can play, and I dance a little,—Jab, dearest angel, don't whine so! Oh, is it set? Is it really over? Oh, thank you,—thank you! Otho! He's fixed it! Isn't it splendid?"

The grizzled haired gentleman looked at the man who had just set Jab's leg and who had now risen to his feet

"It's risky, of course," he said in a low voice. "But we certainly need a fiddler after the way Gardi shook us last week, and if the girl can dance it will help out. They've evidently got in bad with their folks, and there won't be many questions asked. I'll take a chance, I guess."

"I thought you would," said the young man carelessly. "Rather a find, it seems to me. The girl will make up well, and they'll come practically for their transportation."

The grizzled gentleman turned to Jane.

"Say, sister," he said persuasively, "how would you two youngsters like to come along with us? I'm manager of a theatrical company bound for the Coast."

Jane looked at him, her mouth nearly as wide open as her eyes. A theatrical company! She and Otho!

"I mean it," said the manager. "We're short of musicians, and we can always find a place for a bright girl who is willing to learn. If you can dance some, we'll teach you to dance a lot. We don't pay much, but we won't leave you at a tank town to walk home!" He laughed at this as though it were a joke which they ought to appreciate.

Oddly enough, it was at the strange young man that Jane looked first. He gave that rusty smile once more, and said:

"Better come along. I'll see to the pup."

Then Jane's eyes went to Otho.

He was glowing. This was adventure—this was the beginning of the road of ambition! Al-

ready, at this early stage, he was being engaged as a professional musician! The whole future leaped into rose-coloured relief. Jane was incidental; his musical career had begun!

Jane saw that he was satisfied, and getting slowly to her feet with Jab held tenderly in her arms, she stood very still thinking. Conflicting waves, of days past and days to come, seemed swirling about her. So suddenly had she been caught up and flung into the vortex of a new life that she was a little dazed. But she had set out upon an untried road; it was not for her to quarrel with it because its first turning was an unexpected one.

"Thank you," she said, with a grave, old-fashioned dignity. "We will come—all three of us."

CHAPTER VIII

THE STRANGE ROADS

I don't belong to this railway journey at all—I was in a wood just now—and I wish I could get back there!

Through the Looking-Glass.

It was an hour or two later. In her dim berth Jane crouched—she was too excited to lie down—and stared out at the wildly flying moon-greyed world. Jabberwock had fallen asleep from exhaustion and merciful surcease from pain. In a borrowed dressing-gown Jane surveyed the situation and decided that it was not a dream; it was far too queer not to be true. Jane had in her the keen sense of the eternal paradox which comes close to being wisdom. She sensibly distrusted the obvious, and knew that the most painfully commonplace incidents of existence are the most unreal. This unusual experience of hers seemed rather like a story that she was reading than something actually happening to her, but the most unpleasantly realistic accidents often seem like a

nightmare. She grinned her own peculiar little grin as she rumbled madly through the night in her first sleeping-car.

It seemed as though this journey must be part of a story book she was reading. It could not really have anything to do with her.

Jane had never been on a train before. In her short life she had only done what was either obvious or necessary, and there had been no cogent reason why she should take a journey anywhere. Even her mother and stepfather found little to call them from home; twice or thrice in Jane's lifetime had they gone away for short trips. But the girls had never gone, Theodosia herself, favourite of the Molling Weedes and beneficiary of many pleasant grants denied small Jane, had her first railroad jaunt before her. So the very proposition of travelling was in a high degree wonderful to Jane. And the thing itself was even more wonderful than her idea of it. She showed it, too. To the tired players of Mr. Lyter's troupe (Lyter, she learned, was the name of the older, grizzled man, as Brainerd was that of the younger), her candid interest was something quaint, diverting, and curiously pathetic. The things that sickened them—the stuffy car and the smell of coal dust, the

lurching motion, the noise, the sense of eternal restlessness—were all delicious to Jane tonight. That the charm was soon to wear off was a foregone conclusion, but for the hour her eager face gave each member of the company an unexpected thrill of compassionate cordiality.

Tom Brainerd had alternately bullied and subsidized the car porter until he permitted Jab to be stowed away in a berth while his official back was turned. The actors, with the good nature of their kind, had "doubled up" to make places for the two young people. Tom had arranged to bunk in with Fench, an elderly comedian, and Alice Cooke the plump little black-eyed ingénue was sharing a section with Gertie Mills, the soubrette. Otho, who felt somewhat ill at ease with the company, had gone to bed almost at once, as a convenient way of avoiding conversation. Jane had turned in also, because she wanted to do nothing except nurse Jab. Soon afterwards, the car had gradually gone to rest, with the usual interruptions and prolongations and interpolations that attend the concerted action of any fairly intimate aggregation of human beings.

At last, only Tom Brainerd and Nettie Llewellyn were left. Fench, with whom Tom was to sleep,

had gone to bed, but as Nettie had a section to herself she was not obliged to have it made up until she chose, and it was her will to sit up for a bit, and share it with Brainerd.

Nettie was feeling a bit guilty in that she had not offered to give up part of her lion's share of room to the newcomer. Though she was selfish and luxurious by nature, she was kind hearted. Moreover, the general trend of sympathy was with the newcomers, and she went with the crowd as a rule. As a matter of fact, she had held herself aloof a bit coolly for the ridiculous reason that Tom Brainerd had so obviously wished to befriend the waifs. She had an idea that it would not be unwise to show Tom that she could once in a while make up her mind unaided by him; in fact, so crucial had become their arguments of late that she really felt a declaration of independence to be essential.

Still, however fully her reason might approve her attitude of superior indifference, her heart found itself a bit disturbed lest Tom really hold against her her lack of cordiality: a heinous crime, from an actor's viewpoint. For the time being she cared rather more about Tom Brainerd's opinion than about anything else in the world. That she

would soon in the nature of things feel differently, and would fairly speedily discover another center of attraction, seemed only to make her present attitude the more ardently pronounced. Nettie was one of those persons who seem to make up in intensity for what they fall short of in permanence.

"Poor little devil!" she remarked, amicably enough. "She looks like a sick kitten herself,—any one'd want to be decent to her,—her and her dog! That's a peach of a chap with her, too!"

She shot a coquettish look at Brainerd, who was sitting opposite her, his legs crossed and a travelling cap pulled over his left eye.

"Shut up, Nettie!" he said absently. Then he started, and laughed into her eyes with an insolent intimacy of look that she knew pretty well. "I say! You were trying to make me jealous! Beg pardon! Go to it, kid! I should never have thought that your taste ran to wax dolls, but one never can tell. There'll be no bones broken, I guess!"

Nettie Llewellyn flushed with anger and with just a touch of mortification. She had "run with Tom" for more than six months: it was discomfiting—and something more—to realize how little he cared, take it all in all, for what she did or

felt. She had spoken of Otho only as a bluff,—and Tom had called it. Though she was not a very delicate-minded young woman, she felt hurt and ashamed. For she still loved Tom. His rather brutal contemptuous ways fascinated her; the strange combination of world-old views in a young head, of ugly cynicism behind handsome, lowering features, attracted her as it might have repelled another type of woman. Tom Brainerd could, by a word or a look, control her tumultuous temperament. She hated herself for being so abject, but she was utterly his—as yet.

Tom was used to that. At an age when other men are boys, hardly yet dabbling in the mixed stuff of life, or if so wearing yet the rose-tinted glasses of romance-enamoured youth, he was a hard, clever, sensual young animal, fond of women and scornfully conscious of his easy power over them. There was something unconquerably confident about him that made Nettie rage inwardly, even while she adored him. She often had the feeling, when with him, of beating her hands against a wall of rough stone. Her flesh would suffer, but what would the stone wall know or care?

Nettie Llewellyn was rather a superb specimen

of her type. She was not tall, and more than a shade too full of figure, but her lines had all of them that curving richness which can dazzle even the purist in form values. She was by no means perfectly made, but she was none the less alluring for that. What she lacked in specific proportion she gained in pervading physical charm. Her too generous outlines were limned in the rose and ivory of erotic imaginists. She had been born a clear-skinned brunette, but had grown tired of her colouring on the ancient grounds that "everybody has brown hair." She had crept guardedly up through the graded ministrations of henna and "dark auburn" to a pallid blonde which she had decided on permanently as the most effective frame for her face. In one sense, the sense of contrast, it was effective: her complexion was so dark as to be almost olive; the pale gold of her coiffure had something the effect of a gilt frame for a small brown photograph. It was unnatural and it was inartistic, but it was rather interesting.

In the flickering light of the car lamps, she looked much lovelier than she really was. Fatigue had painted becoming violet shadows beneath her eyes, and her nicely put on makeup showed only as a delicate apple-blossom bloom.

"Tom, I'm horribly tired," she said softly, in just the gentle complaining tone that so often won for her a word of casual but comforting sympathy, but which, true to type, she was too apt to overdo. Tonight it did not work at all well. Tom merely shrugged his shoulders, and pulled a small notebook from his pocket. Ignoring Nettie entirely, he began to write in it, stopping every now and then to scowl.

"Oh, what is it now?" she demanded, irritated. "Can't you stop writing even for five minutes?"

Tom did not answer, and in one of her gusts of ungovernable rage, she leaned forward and knocked the book from his hand.

He picked it up without a change of expression, but he remarked as he set to work again:

"I wouldn't do that. I'd box your ears with pleasure, as you know."

"You're a brute!" Nettie began to cry.

"Sure I am! Now, shut up, there's a good girl, and let me work out these estimates for Lyter. He wants them first thing in the morning."

"So that's what it is,—the company's accounts?"

"That's what I said. Keep still, I tell you! Hold on, want a drink?"

He pulled a flask from his pocket and held it

toward her without looking up. Nettie pounced on it. She had fallen into the habit of "bracing" on one-night stands. Few of the fourth rate players escape it, and it is the more insidious because only too often their racked nerves and exhausted bodies do really need a stimulant. This is the chief danger of all unnatural ways of life. They become well-nigh impossible without artificial help of one sort or another; the artificial help creates conditions still more abnormal, and so the vicious circle goes on.

Nettie had not reached the point where she was dependent wholly upon alcohol to spur her vitality; she was too young and too sound for that. But she did appreciate her occasional drink, and tonight the rather more than generous mouthful which she took from Tom's flask was especially grateful. As she was really tired and below par, it did not go to her head: it merely rested her, and made her feel for the moment more amiable and consequently more indiscreet.

After a little she reached forward, and put her hand softly upon Tom's knee.

"I'm sorry I was cross!" she whispered contritely.

But it was a bad time to choose for affectionate

demonstrations. Tom was in the middle of a close calculation as to baggage transportation, trying to make each dollar do the work of two and still coming out at the wrong end of Lyter's estimate for the coming week.

He threw off the conciliatory hand with a low but sufficiently fervent curse. And Nettie, who had only needed that, burst into a veritable storm of hysterical, sobbing grief.

Tom flung down his account book, and ran his fingers through his rough hair, his face pale with anger and desperation. He was far more tired than Nettie had ever been. He had been acting as stage manager and chief stage hand, and had doubled in two trying little parts during the week. He had his own reasons for working himself so relentlessly; they were to him cogent ones, and he objected bitterly to being distracted from the task he had set himself.

"Oh, for God's sake!" he groaned savagely. "Dry up, or you'll wake the whole car! There, of course! You see? What a damned fool you are anyway!" he added under his breath, as Lyter's thin voice demanded with asperity from between a pair of adjacent curtains "what the devil was the matter?"

His grizzled head appeared suddenly suspended against the dingy velvet, and he went on with an accent of disgust:

"Boozing again! Put that flask away, Nettie, and go to bed. Can't you keep her quiet, Tom?"

"She can scream her head off so far as I am concerned," returned Tom brutally.

He rose as he spoke, jamming his notebook into his pocket. "I'm going to the smoker!" he growled. "Let her finish the flask. Maybe it'll keep her quiet!"

Nettie threw the flask after him, and flew into shrieking hysterics. The crash of the broken glass sounded loudly; for the train was slowing up for a station. The acrid smell of spilled whisky added to the stuffiness of the car.

Jane had opened her curtains, and sat looking out, feeling as though she were in a vilely unpleasant dream.

For a moment she shrank from the screaming girl in the seat across the aisle. Then she slid out of her berth deliberately and promptly, and took a tight hold of Nettie Llewellyn's shoulder.

"Stop that this minute!" she exclaimed in the tone of surprised annoyance that one adopts toward a small child in a tantrum. "Good heavens!

I never heard such a silly row as you're making in all my born days!"

Nettie stopped screaming, and looked at her with her mouth open. Lyter looked too, with profound relief. Seeing that the new member of the company seemed capable of handling Nettie's hysterics, he withdrew his grey head and went to sleep again.

Tom Brainerd, on his way down the car, had stopped at the sound of Jane's voice. He looked at her with an odd expression, and his glance travelled from her to Nettie, huddled, though gorgeously, in the car seat. Jane was arrayed in a dressing-gown belonging to one of the women in the company. It was several sizes too large for her, and trailed about her absurdly. She had tucked up the long sleeves and her hands looked like those of a child. They appeared to be firm little hands, however. Tom could see Nettie wince a little under their reproving clutch.

A slow grin stole over his dark countenance. Then he turned and left the car. He, too, perceived that Jane was supremely mistress of the situation!

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST MORNING

The weak and the gentle, the ribald and rude,
She took as she found them, and did them all good.

ELIZABETH B. BROWNING.

JANE woke to a pervading smell of cinders and a general ache in all her bones. This is a common affliction after a first night in a sleeper. There is also apt to be a jarred feeling in the disposition, as well as in the body. She was too healthy not to have slept,—only a subconscious alertness to Jab's whines as he tried to turn over had kept her from deep repose. But with the early morning she realized that she was too utterly uncomfortable to stay in that berth another minute.

As she sat up she wanted to whine like Jab, for she felt nearly as stiff and sore as did he. It takes a good deal of practice to become really inured to the shattering protection of a sleeping-car's roof!

She had opened the window a crack the night before, leaving her shoe in it as a wedge, and the

coal dust had drifted in, as thick as sand in a desert storm. She tasted and smelt it, felt it grittily down her neck and smartingly in her eyes. In dismay she beheld it smooched all over her clean clothes. Poor Jab was deluged in it. Unable to move, he had lain resignedly in one position until he had been entirely snowed under,—if one can use such an expression in relation to anything as blackly dirty as those railway cinders!

“Oh, poor angel!” commiserated Jane, petting him. “Was he buried ’most out of sight till nothing but his precious nose was left out?”

She closed the window, releasing her shoe in a much squashed condition, and put up both shades. The country through which they were travelling was very level and empty looking. There were fields on fields as flat as a table, and not many trees. Everywhere was the gold or silver shimmer of grain of some sort growing in huge squares as evenly laid out as any checkerboard. Dotted along at more or less regular intervals were farm-houses, but there seemed few villages. Everything looked extremely large. The effect of these great distances startled Jane who had come from a closely settled rolling country.

She dressed as well as she could in the swaying,

jolting berth, and emerged into the aisle in search of information as to the next stop.

She nearly ran into Fench, the comedian, collarless and unshaven, carrying a bag and a pair of enormous boots. He was a short stout man who seldom smiled; on the stage he could be excruciatingly funny. As Jane was to learn later, he had known profound sorrow, and some of it looked out of his kind little eyes. He was not of a tragic build, so thoughtless people were inclined to make fun of him. Jane liked him immediately. She thought that he looked like a sad old child with his plump unhappy face and pudgy form.

"Good-morning," she said with her friendliest smile.

"Good-day, little lady with the shining morning face," he responded quaintly.

"It's more like shoe-shine isn't it?" giggled Jane.

Fench looked at her wistfully.

"My daughter would have been fifteen," he said abruptly.

"I'm nearly eighteen."

"So!" She thought he looked slightly disappointed. "I hope you rested well?" he went on, with the old-fashioned politeness of a host inquiring for his guest's well-being.

"Oh, yes, thanks! Will you tell me where we stop next, and how long we'll be there?"

"We will have fifteen minutes at Carey, for breakfast. Are you hungry?"

"Not very, but my dog is!"

"Ah, yes! I recall seeing your dog last night. A noble creature, the dog! If my destiny had not been cast in the world of drama I should have owned dogs. Command me, I beg, if I can be of any service!"

The bag and the boots did not in the least detract from the dignity of his bow. In his youth he had longed to play leading parts and though the dream had not materialized, he never forgot it.

As he passed on, a voice called plaintively from behind the nearest pair of curtains:

"Who's that? Is that the porter?"

"It's I," said Jane. "Shall I come in?"

She spoke as though the curtains were a bedroom door.

"I wish you would, I feel so rotten!"

She found herself looking down at Nettie Llewellyn,—a very different Nettie from the one generally put on public view. Her pale yellow hair was much tousled and had that peculiarly dead look that dyed hair has before it is brushed. Her dark skin

was covered thickly with cold cream, and her eyes were heavy and unattractive.

"For heaven's sake, get hold of Tom!" she implored. "Tell him to get me a drink;—I need it!"

Jane regarded her, and with all her inexperience was inclined to think she did. She felt rather worried; Jane had a way of getting worried over other people's affairs. Yet she never would interfere, whatever her temptation. She was the soul of tact and bitterly averse to preaching. Just the same she thought that a mild scare would not come amiss with Nettie.

"Is it that that gives you those funny little red blotches round your nose?" she asked with seeming innocence.

Nettie flushed faintly.

"They—they're a sort of cold sore," she declared. "And they don't show when they're powdered down."

"Oh," said Jane, "I didn't know. I'll get you something to drink,—though I should think it would taste rather nasty in the morning. Who did you say to ask?"

"Tom, of course."

"What's his name besides Tom?"

"Brainerd. He's the man who fixed your dog. Isn't he handsome?"

"Oh, that one! I'll go and find him."

Jane closed the curtains and stood considering. At that moment Brainerd himself appeared at the end of the aisle. He was completely dressed and already shaved. Indeed he was always the last man to turn in and the first to turn out. He saw Jane and came toward her, walking easily in spite of the lurching train,—Lyter's company did not travel over the very best roads. She went to meet him, and with a nod of greeting began:

"She wants something to drink."

"Nettie? She's no business bothering you about it!" He frowned.

"Never mind all that. Doesn't she need it really? Wouldn't it be good for her?"

He shrugged his heavy shoulders. "She'd probably feel better for a while."

"Then go ahead and get it at once, please."

He stared at her and half grinned.

"You're a queer little thing! he commented. "You don't look like the sort that'd be hustling drinks at this hour!"

"I never gave any one a drink in my life," said Jane honestly. "But she looks awful!"

"Well, it's seven A.M.," said Tom, as if that were answer enough. "All right, I'll see what I can do."

He vanished and returned with a tumbler of whisky and water.

"This will set her up all right," he said. "I guess she does feel pretty rotten. She's always a rag after one of her tantrums. But she doesn't need any more today."

"Oh," said Jane with businesslike confidence, "I'll attend to that."

She administered the drink to Nettie, persuaded her to dress and get ready for breakfast, and returned the glass to Brainerd.

"You're beginning pleasantly!" he said with rough sarcasm. "How's the pup?"

"He hardly cried at all, all night!" Jane reported joyously. "But he must be hungry, and I do want to take him out at the next station."

"We get into Carey in a few minutes."

"Then I'll get ready right away. Is my face terribly dirty?"

"Rather. But you look all right to me!"

Jane smiled, without reading anything offensive in his bold glance.

"Do you know where Otho is?" she asked.

"What do you want him for?"

"I want to feed him! laughed Jane candidly. "You see, I have to take care of him and Jab, and it wouldn't do to let them miss their very first breakfast, would it?"

Tom regarded her. "You *are* a queer little thing!" he said again. "Have it your own way! I'll try to rout out that precious infant of yours if I can."

Five minutes later, Jane and Jab descended at the tiny Middle West station of Carey. They were both grateful beyond belief for the clean air and the prospect of food. The small lunch room was speedily overcrowded, and the one girl in charge was in a state of confusion bordering on delirium. Seven in the morning was seldom a rush hour, but Lyter's people had been warned that they would make two close connections that day and that there would be no regular meals until sometime in the afternoon. Accordingly, everyone had tumbled out half-dressed, with capes and rain-coats over their *déshabillé*, some of the men without collars, a few of the women with their hair still in curl papers. The aggregation was a weird one, and the poor young woman in the lunch room looked at them as if they were so many horned demons.

It was impossible for her to serve everyone, so

the actors and stage hands pitched in and helped. Lyter, Tom, and Fench dispensed coffee from the big urn on the counter, and the women doled out hard-boiled eggs, bananas, and ham sandwiches. Alice Cooke made a hit by darting into the kitchen back of the main room and frying eggs and bacon as capably as though she burned to live up to her name.

And all the while there was an increasing clatter of dishes and of laughter combined. Jane, after she had made Jab comfortable on her coat in a corner seat, went to work with the rest, cutting and buttering bread as fast as she could, and filling innumerable tumblers with milk.

She looked around anxiously for Otho, and as she did not see him, appropriated two thick sandwiches for him. She mourned that she had no way of saving him any coffee. Jab gorged himself five times over on the scraps the actors all brought him, and the smell of frying bacon and strong bad coffee filled the jammed little place. The lunch-room girl early gave up keeping any sort of account, but she gained rather than lost by her unbusiness-like flurry. Coins kept coming thick and fast.

"Here you are, sister,—I had three eggs and a cup of coffee. Will half a dollar square it?"

"'Ten cents' worth of ham for me, Miss!"

"'Here's a dollar from three of us, and keep the change!"

"'Four bits, ma'am,—and your coffee's the worst yet, if you'll excuse me for mentioning it!"

Outside the station a band of revivalists, waiting for their local train, began to sing:

So call we now the powers of good
From round the sacred Throne—

Jane knew the hymn and the words that followed and, as she paused by one of the littered tables to gulp down a glass of milk, she had a comfortable chuckle all by herself.

"'What's the great idea?" demanded Tom Brainerd, coming up to her. "'Here's some breakfast for you, if you'll pass along the joke!"

Jane seized the plate of eggs gratefully.

"'Oh, thanks!—I *am* hungry! Wait till I give some to Jab."

"'For the Lord's sake, don't!" urged Brainerd. "'He's been eating steadily ever since you brought him in here. He'll burst in a minute. Eat it yourself. What are you laughing at?"

"'These Salvation Army people, or whatever they are, outside. Do you hear what they are singing?"

Tom listened to the lugubrious wailing without, and shook his head.

"Back-fence stuff," he said, "that's all I know about it."

"They do sound like cats! But what they're singing now is:

*We do not ask for earthly food,
We feast on Heaven alone!*

Tom laughed outright. "Sort of personal, isn't it?" he said. "I suppose we do look like a set of hogs, stuffing like this, but we'll be lucky if we see another cracker before night! Hello, who's here! How are you, Nettie? Get a move on, the coffee's nearly gone!"

Miss Llewellyn lost no time in fortifying herself as he suggested. She was carefully dressed and quite well made up. Jane marvelled at the speed with which she had accomplished it. She was a really pretty woman when she took pains with herself, and Jane hastened to say so.

"How nice she looks!" she said sincerely, as Nettie went off to the counter.

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"She's not a bad-looking girl," he said carelessly. "But she's too fat, and getting fatter.

She can't wear tights any more. Did you find your fiddler?"

"No; you said you'd find him for me," replied Jane, trying not to be repelled by the apparent coarseness in the man.

He laughed again. "He wasn't in his berth when I looked for him," he said. "Forget him, kid! He'll make out all right, take my word for it!"

"I've kept some sandwiches for him," said Jane, still anxious.

Tom looked at her.

"Then keep 'em for yourself!" he advised her. "You'll be hungry by and by."

Outside the revivalists wailed on:

Oh, brothers, sisters, turn from sin,
Look not to left or right;
Your *own* salvation must you win,
And you may die tonight!

"You know," said Brainerd abruptly, "this is a damned selfish life."

Jane did not look surprised at the suddenness of this. Her mind was so attuned to things in general that it rarely was shocked into absolute astonishment. Moreover, the statement seemed credible enough.

"I suppose so," she nodded, and appropriately reached for a particularly succulent red apple.

Tom did not quite grin this time. He was grudging, as we have seen, with his manifestations of pleasure. But a flicker, more or less agreeable, passed over his lowering countenance.

"There you are!" he said. "You'll get in the way of it,—you'll see! Everyone for himself! If you don't follow that, you're left—quite literally left! Wait till you get in to some one-night burg and have to hustle for a room! Then watch your ideas of politeness and unselfishness and even decency go to pot while you wait! *Ha!*" The final ejaculation certainly was not a laugh.

"Say," spoke a reproachful voice near by, "ain't there *any* cawfee left?"

It was the train conductor, and his weary face expressed sorrow rather than anger. "Six months have I always had my breakfast here," he proclaimed, "an' today I can't get even a cup o' cawfee! I al'ays said actors was more trouble than they was wuth!"

Despondently he poured himself out a glass of tepid water, and departed, munching a stale roll and still muttering:

"More trouble than they're wuth, I al'ays said!"

"I reckon there's more truth than poetry in that," said Brainerd bitterly. "We're a bum bunch, take us all in all! *You* don't belong with us, anyhow!"

When the company, more or less replete, trooped back to the train, the melancholy exponents of religion were droning:

Though evil snares are round us set
In Jordan are we laved;
Though Satan's hordes be with us yet,
Our souls shall still be saved!

Jane was still laughing as she climbed into the car.

"Darling," she said to Jab, whom she carried in her arms, "did you know you were one of 'Satan's hordes'? You don't look it, you know——"

She stopped short, for she had suddenly come face to face with Otho. He was looking very well and cheerful, a little more colour in his face than usual.

"Oh, Otho, where were you? I wanted you to go to breakfast——"

"I went with a couple of the other chaps," said Otho, carelessly. "Don't bother! I'm feeling fine!"

Jane looked after him bewildered, as he swung down the car.

"He went to a saloon," interpreted Nettie Llewellyn at her elbow. "I saw him with a bunch of the toughest fellows coming out of one when I went to breakfast. Even these tank-town gin mills have free lunches, and lots of the boys prefer that sort of thing. But if you've any influence with the kid you'll discourage it good and plenty and early in the game!"

Jane looked at the sandwiches she had saved for her child-man. Then she chanced to encounter the hungry gaze of Mrs. Fanshawe, the old lady of the company. She was an intrepid old warrior, but much crippled by rheumatism, and, as Jane instinctively divined, not able to rush about after food like the rest of them. She had utilized the time when they were eating to dress and have her berth made up, and she now sat rigidly erect, every grey hair in place, a dignified stoicism enwrapping her. There was a cracker box in her lap, and the sight went to Jane's heart.

"Won't you have these sandwiches?" she asked eagerly. "I know you weren't able to go to breakfast——"

The old lady glared.

"Thank you!" she said with acidity. "But it was not that I was '*not able*,' as you very stupidly and inconsiderately expressed it. I have not yet lost the use of any of my limbs nor faculties, young woman! I did not go because I did not happen to wish to go!"

"It *was* a stupid way of putting it!" exclaimed Jane, in an agony of remorse for her tactlessness. "So many people find they can get on better without breakfast, don't they? I am rather greedy, I'm afraid! I saved these sandwiches, and now I really think I should be better off without them! I believe I'll just throw them away!"

Mrs. Fanshawe closed the empty cracker box without looking up.

"I do not believe in waste—" she began, but she did not finish. She put out her hand for the sandwiches, and Jane saw it tremble as she took them.

That was Jane's first morning with Mr. Lyter's troupe.

CHAPTER X

TOM MAKES A MISTAKE

Should I not call her wise, who made me wise?
And learnt? I learnt more from her in a flash
Than if my brainpan were an empty hull,
And every Muse tumbled a science in!

ALFRED TENNYSON.

THE Lyter troupe was playing a three-play repertory of fifty-cent shows through the tank towns all the way to the Pacific Ocean. They carried as little scenery as possible, using the regular theatre sets wherever they could; their salary list would have made a Bowery lunch wagon look opulent, and they calculated down to quarters and dimes when they made advance estimates. Everybody doubled in parts, and no one kicked too strenuously when the "ghost" was truly incapable of locomotion. Nevertheless, it was by no means one of the worst companies on the road, for the reason that Lyter himself was on the square, and the actors knew that if there was anything to get they would get it. There are many profes-

sional situations far worse than this. For, as every barnstormer knows, the real nightmare life is working for a man who is likely to leave you in the lurch in some God-forsaken, one-horse village, while he clears out with the week's receipts.

A man who will stand by you to the best of his abilities even if those abilities are small and the attendant liabilities large, is some one to tie up to. Players are temperamentally loyal folk, and their enthusiasms will keep them faithful to a very unpromising master, if they feel that he trusts and needs them.

Jane spent about twenty-four hours in generally appraising the troupe which, so to speak, had adopted her. Then, with an inward giggle, she came to the conclusion that they were just a new species of Hoblillies and Joblillies, and accepted them with the philosophical friendliness with which she accepted nearly all humans, pleasant or otherwise.

For she loved these actors. Their absurdities and their pathos were forever getting mixed, and the mixture was peculiarly appealing to Jane's humorous and pitiful heart. Players are nearly always emotional folk, and the further down they get on the professional scale the more emotional

they become. Great actors are too intellectual and too single-heartedly devoted to their art to be weak, and there is a saving restraint required by "position" which keeps the moderately distinguished of their craft from degenerating below a certain fixed standard required by their noblesse oblige. But, stripped of the divided incentive of a personal standing to be maintained and a dignified art to represent, the average player is almost surely bound to deteriorate. Some tension becomes relaxed and more relaxed with every shift downward from the first-class theatrical world. The thing is like a violin string which sags in pitch as the bracing pegs get loose and looser; semitone by semitone, the string drops out of tune, until at last it hangs limp and useless, emitting only a dismal echo without music,—the final, melancholy symbol of the unwanted, fourth-rate old actor.

There is no world more elemental, no community closer to simple and sometimes sordid facts of life than this inferior stage community, this lower theatrical world. The artificialities are symbols rather than disguises; the discords are made out of the primal keynotes of existence jangling together. The men and women of Lyter's company were intensely human,—more than any one that

Jane had ever met. The humanity of them, their absurd generousities, their tragic jealousies, their unimaginable pluck, their startling callousness, their paradoxical sympathy,—even the brutalities and vanities and meannesses which sprang from living too close to the terrible and ridiculous things of life,—all made them lovable to Jane. She felt that she understood them,—understood them far better than she had ever understood her mother, or 'Dosia, or the Grand Panjandrum; understood them even better than she was ever likely to understand Otho Lendrick. They might be only Hoblillies and Joblillies, but she loved them and made them her own. And before the week was out there was not a soul in the company whom she did not mother and manage,—always with the exception of Tom Brainerd.

He flatly refused to be taken under her wing, holding himself aloof from her endearing and funny little ministrations and authorities, as though with the deliberate intention of forcing her to consider him in a different light from the others.

Those others adored her. Even Nettie Llewellyn really liked her, though it was generally believed by the cynical company that her assiduous culti-

vation of the little O'Reilly was not entirely disinterested. There was a difference of opinion concerning the guiding motive. Mrs. Fanshawe had it that it was a canny scheme to keep Jane under her jealous vigilance in case Tom showed signs of devoting himself to the newcomer rather too gallantly. Alice Cooke, the black-eyed ingénue, agreed with Gertie Mills, and their view was the view of youth,—shrewd, modern youth! They declared vulgarly that Nettie had her eye on the fiddling chap herself, and kept in with the girl to be “next” to him. The men shrugged their shoulders, and said with masculine tolerance,—or indifference,—“Oh, hell! Nettie might do something decent once in a while without getting anything out of it! Can't you girls give her the benefit of the doubt? Women make me sick!”

Tom Brainerd had no idea why this red-haired small person with the clear, sweet eyes and the infectious laugh attracted him so much. She was not, he told himself, at all his type. There were chaps who liked those little bits of sparkling women, with more charm than looks, and the gift of being a jolly little pal; but he had an idea that his taste ran rather to Nettie's sort,—the prettily animal breed, good-hearted, but fashioned pri-

marily and obviously to appeal to the lower passions. Therefore, he asked himself, why was he fool enough to be in the least interested in a pale little witch like Jane O'Reilly. He laughed at himself contemptuously, and decided it was merely a freakish sex impulse: he was altogether too well acquainted with the vast area covered by that.

But he did himself an injustice. There was in him something much finer than that, and that something responded to Jane's elusive spell as unerringly as unconsciously. Dullard and brute that he so far was, he could not interpret it truly. He translated the feeling he had for the girl into the somewhat gross terminology of his habit of mind. To be attracted by a woman meant to his view, and in his experience, one thing and one alone. Like many of his kind, he had mentally debased the clean and beautiful word desire from its primitive dignity to something degraded. It was a matter of early and evil association of ideas. Unaccustomed to think of passion save as an unclean thing, he had not yet awakened to the possibilities of its fiery purity,—possibilities which yet lay strongly dormant in himself. Like millions of highly sexed men, he held sex in deep contempt; but there was that in him which would one day

bring him to his knees before its might and its mystery.

It was about ten days after Jane and Otho had joined the company that something happened to change the situation between her and Tom. Abruptly he asked her if she wanted to go out on the back platform of the car. They were at the rear of the train, and often that back platform was a crowded spot, for the country through which she flew was sometimes lovely and nearly always interesting. Tonight it was too cold for the other girls to venture out, so Jane and Brainerd went alone, armed with camp-stools provided by the porter, who was a psalm-singing Baptist when he was at home and inclined to disapprove of their calling, but who liked them nevertheless.

They were swinging through the sandy gorges of the West. There was a pinkish purple sky, and a wraith-like moon peered at them from around sudden curves. The train rocked as it sped, and goblin cacti showed black against the undulant horizon. The noise of the rushing train, so jarring inside the cars, became different when diffused in the open air. It made now a monstrous song, full of an eccentric music, and oddly suggestive of such elemental things as seas and tempests. Jane was

getting to love the song of the train,—especially after dark.

“What have you written your people?” demanded Tom suddenly, as he lighted a cigarette.

Jane started. Not even Otho had asked what she had done about that. As a matter of fact, she had written not only to Mrs. Molling Weede but to Otho’s old grandfather, giving assurances of their safety, but no further information.

“Just that we’re all right,” she said in answer.

“Don’t you suppose they’re trying to trace you?”

“I don’t see why in the world they should!” exclaimed Jane, opening her eyes wide.

“I do.” Tom looked at her, and then looked away. “It’s possible, you know, that they might not approve of this.”

“Of our being with actors, you mean?”

“No, I don’t mean that only,—though I dare say they wouldn’t be quite crazy about that either! I mean, my child, that it’s not common for the family of a kid like you to sit down and see her go to the devil without lifting a finger to save her.”

“But why,” Jane wished to know, in sincere wonder, “should I go to the devil?”

“Oh, well, if you pretend not to understand—”

Tom gave his usual shrug. "What do you see in that fiddler fellow of yours anyhow?" he demanded, scowling at her.

He sat balanced, precariously as it seemed to Jane, on the rear railing.

"I wish you wouldn't sit there!" she said sharply. "It makes me nervous!"

"Nonsense!" Tom was not used to moving because of a woman's whims. "Go ahead: answer my questions."

"What was it? Oh, about Otho! Why, it was a silly sort of question. I'm going to marry Otho sometime. Didn't you understand?"

"Yes. I understood that you said so, all right. But what I don't understand yet is—why!"

Jane did not trouble to be polite.

"That's our business," she rejoined flatly.

Tom grinned and the grin was approving.

"I want to make it mine," he said, with that insolently intimate note in his voice which usually went so well with the women to whom he was accustomed.

Jane regarded him in the dim, mauve-tinted light. He was looking at her steadily, rather ardently. His lids were a bit heavy over his dark eyes; his full mouth was set determinedly, but it

held the suggestion of a smile,—a smile which made Jane incomprehensibly uncomfortable.

“Can’t you see?” he went on in a quick undertone. “You—you’re a little wonder of a girl! You’re worth a dozen of Lendrick. I want you for myself!”

Jane’s brows contracted, and she looked at him with a sort of puzzled indignation. It enraged Tom, that ridiculous expression of hers, just as though she were the virtuous village maid and all that sort of thing! Here she was, turned out by her people and running away openly enough with a good-looking young fool whom she was to marry “sometime”! And she was putting on airs of high and mighty innocence!

He laughed outright,—not a very nice laugh,—and threw his cigarette away deliberately. Then, just as deliberately, he rose and came to Jane’s side. He bent over her as she sat motionless, and pulled her up to him, holding her against him and crushing his lips slowly but inexorably down on hers.

To her sensitive consciousness the brutal kiss was something hideously bad and significant. It took all her nerve and good sense to keep her from striking him in the face or crumpling up with

shame. As it was, she stood still, her mouth and cheek turning icy cold against his, every bit of her steady and unresponsive.

No blow nor storm of protest could have checked Tom Brainerd so effectively. He slowly released her, and stood away, breathing heavily, his eyes wide open and startled. In his reckless young life he had never felt so nonplussed, so at a disadvantage. Jane dropped back onto her camp-stool; her small white face had not changed its lines, but her green eyes had deepened in the queer way they had to inkiest black.

Brainerd found himself against his will an almost automatic apology, but before he had time to get it into words, he heard her say:

“*Why* did you do that?”

There was a worried little ache in the words, as though she regretted the whole thing beyond expression, yet could know no resentment. He hardened his heart against the sentiment which was beginning to obtrude itself upon it, and said sullenly:

“Why do you suppose a man kisses a girl? Because I care more about you than any one I’ve ever seen. You’ve got me half crazy. I want you——”

He saw her clear yet troubled look, and plunged angrily, stubbornly on:

"You may think you're in love with Lendrick, but I'll swear you're not. Maybe you've got yourself into a mess, and feel you've got to stand by it,—got to marry him anyway. You haven't. You're the one I want. I don't care what you've done in the past. I'm not fool enough to ask for the impossible in——"

Suddenly he stopped.

A strange cold feeling crept down his spine, and a veil began to drop before his eyes. The sensation was not unlike the ghastly, morbidly lucid sobriety following a term of excess. . . .

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Jane, quite honestly.

Tom Brainerd turned from her, and took two lurching steps away. The disagreeable clearness with which he saw for the moment made him almost physically ill. He was shown to himself suddenly as a brute made in man's image, a sort of unclean satyr confronted by a swift counter vision of healthy purity. He did not stop wanting Jane; he only began to understand a little better the way he wanted her. He did not make the crowning mistake of cherishing a celibate ideal where she

was concerned: he merely set himself, rather humbly for him, to fit himself for her. He was forced to see that whatever he had imagined her to be through the smirched glasses of his mind, she was really just a wise, heart-white child as safe from her own passions as, henceforward, she would be safe from his. Whatever the young fiddler was, he was not her lover, as men understood that term.

And then, as he looked at Jane and then stopped looking, troubled unaccountably by the very strangeness of his abashment, she amazed him by breaking into a shaky but kindly little laugh.

"How very silly of you to make all this bother, when you know I am going to marry Otho!"

Tom shut his teeth hard. . . . He turned back to her.

"You forgive me?" he forced himself to say.

"Of course!" She tried to sound offhand, but her voice trembled.

"Thank you." He drew a long breath. "I want to say this once, and then I shan't have to say it again,—you'll understand. . . . I've made a mistake about you. A rotten mistake, that you're too sweet and clean even to understand. I'll never make that mistake again,—about you, or about any other woman. I——"

He stopped short, and seemed to struggle with himself before going on. But he did go on, haltingly, with an accent of earnestness:

"I love you. I believe—if I ever had a chance—I could make you love me. Maybe not. But I give you fair warning. I'm going to try. You're not bound to any one else——"

"I am!" Jane broke in.

Tom Brainerd smiled a more human smile than was his wont.

"Bless your baby heart!" he said gently. "You're not! You don't know what it means yet. It's up to me to show you."

He went in without another word, and left her alone on the rear platform.

"Oh, I hate him!" furiously breathed Jane to the wan sickle moon that was floating in the greying mauve of the sky.

The train rocked dizzily round a curve, and a jutting, jagged cliff shut out the pale crescent. Jane crouched in the deepening shadow, in the rushing wind, and shivered intolerably.

"I hate him!" she whispered again, and hid her face, though there was no one to look at her.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE ROAD

. . . Powers

Fresh, undiverted to the world without,
Firm to their mark, not spent on other things;
Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt,
Which much to have tried, in much been baffled, brings.
O life unlike to ours!

Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
Of whom each strives, nor knows for what he strives,
And each half lives a hundred different lives. . . .

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

It was a hard, wearying trip, and when, in the spring, they finally approached the coast, they were all pretty well spent. They kept cheering each other up with "Wait till we get to 'Frisco!" In some well-nigh miraculous way, Lyter had obtained "time" at a small theatre in the Golden Gate City, a house usually used for cheap stock offerings but for the moment "dark"—which is theatrical for not being played in. The company, appreciating the glory of playing in a big town after the awful places which had been their portion on

the road, took a brighter view of life as the time drew near.

After one-night stands, a six weeks' run sounded too impossibly good to be true. Their tired eyes sparkled when they thought of it; theirs was the joy of looking forward to at least a brief period of being real, honest-to-God actors, and not "a bunch of travelling side shows," as Charlie Dixon bitterly termed them. "The audiences would have more respect for performing dogs!" he invariably added.

Dixon was their nearest approach to a leading man, and, in Jane's understanding eyes, one of the truly pathetic figures of the company. He was an enthusiastic youth with ambitions, and had really believed that, in being engaged as "lead" in Lyter's troupe, he was ascending many rungs of his ladder of aspirations. He had no experience to speak of, but he was good looking, seemed energetic, and would come for a song, so the manager had taken a chance on him. He had been a conspicuous failure from the first. Bad as the show was, he was noticeably worse, and he knew it. While no visionary idealist like Otho Lendrick, he had had tremendous dreams when he started, and the realization that they were likely to remain dreams had soured his healthy young optimism considerably.

Also, his health was giving way, and his nerves were at the breaking point.

He talked about it to Jane, late one night while they were waiting for their sleeper to pull in. Everybody, sooner or later, talked about themselves to Jane.

"Oh, I'm a good actor—not!" he remarked, making up a cigarette with twitching fingers. "I'm not even amateurish—amateurs can be taught sometimes. I'm just rotten bad professional, which is a damned sight worse. Old Fench has forgotten more about acting than I shall ever know, and even Tom Brainerd can give me cards and spades. He's not a natural born actor, but anything he does, he does well. He's in this game for what he can get out of it, and I bet it will be some haul when he gets it! But *me!*"

He bit his cigarette so viciously that he spoiled it; he threw it away, and nervously began another.

Jane looked pityingly at his thin, handsome face, with the premature lines about the mouth, and the patches of feverish colour beneath the haggard eyes.

"I don't know how you can expect to know as much about acting as Mr. Fench," she said, soothingly sensible as usual. "He's three times

your age. When you're as old, and have had as much experience——"

"I'll be washing dishes at Childs'!" he declared. "I wasn't cut out for the life; *I* know. Gee! I wish I had Tom's nerve!"

"I wish you had his *nerves*!" Jane said, watching the shaking hands. "You're terribly overtired, Mr. Dixon. You've fidgeted yourself into a fever, and you'll be worn out by the time we get to San Francisco."

"Oh, well," he said flippantly, "then Lyter can chuck me overboard the way you do worn out things, and buy a new one!"

Jane watched him closely for a day or two, and then went to Lyter about it. But the manager had troubles of his own, as he somewhat irritably reminded her.

"Dixon's a rotten actor," he said, "and I suppose he's trying to excuse his bad performances on the grounds of nervousness, that's all. He's no worse off than any one else. Playing one-night stands through the Southwest in the spring isn't expected to be a rest cure. Besides, bad as he is, he's the only lead we've got and we can't spare him. Now run away, like a good kid; I'm busy!"

So Jane, after a little hesitation, went to Tom.

It was in the middle of a ten-hour journey, and he was sitting in the hot and dusty day coach with his coat off, the seat opposite him littered with time-tables, and a narrow ledger open on his knee.

"I want to talk to you," said Jane.

He looked up with the immediate clearing and softening of his sullen face which she had learned would always greet her now.

"Sure!" He made a place for her beside him, and, rather to her indulgent amusement, reached for his coat.

"Don't bother to put that thing on—it's fearfully hot, isn't it? I'm worried, Mr. Brainerd."

"What's the trouble? Is Jab sick?"

"No, thank goodness! But he will be if he has to go on travelling in baggage cars! It isn't Jab——"

"Then I suppose Lendrick's got hay fever or indigestion or something."

"No, it's Mr. Dixon."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Tom with a smile. "Have you adopted another one?"

Jane chuckled.

"It's a dreadful habit!" she acknowledged. "And I think it grows on you!"

"I jolly well know it grows on *you*!" exclaimed

Brainerd. "But I vow it's becoming!" He looked at her with a quick glow back of his lowering dark eyes. "Why don't you look cross and sick and frazzled like the rest of the outfit?" he demanded.

"Because I don't feel cross or sick *or* frazzled," Jane returned, tranquilly and truthfully. "I'm having a wonderful time!"

"Merciful powers—why?"

"Because it's all new, partly," she answered. "I can't see how anything can be very awful while it's new!"

"I see," said Brainerd, with his rusty smile which was growing less rusty of late. "I take it that hell itself would be entertaining till the novelty wore off?"

"Exactly!" declared Jane with another chuckle.

It was a real comfort to her to be able to talk nonsense with some one. To look at him, you would imagine Tom Brainerd about the most unlikely person for that sort of thing. But though he did not often joke himself, he always seemed to understand her whimsical point of view and to respond to it.

"Aren't you really tired?" he said, dropping his tone. His eyes searched the small colourless

face, which somehow never looked colourless because of the light and sparkle and eagerness of it.

Jane was always pale, and as slender as a little silver birch tree. But the heat and hard travel had not drained a particle of her vivid, brilliant vitality. She had bloomed rather than faded or drooped. Her rust red hair glistened with a warmer lustre; her green eyes seemed more jewel-like than of old. The tilted smile that always had been so charming was pure witchery now. Little Jane was far more attractive and far prettier than at the beginning of the trip, and she was, subtly, more grown up. Not that she was less simple, or more sophisticated. No experience could do that to Jane. Time could not make her old; the world could never make her worldly wise. But the tour had in some indefinable manner left her more assured, mellower, more a woman.

Today, in a cheap little brown linen frock which she had bought for a few dollars at one of their more pretentious stopping places, she suggested one of the fresh, pale gold California poppies that fringed the railway tracks every day now. She was very dear to Brainerd,—so dear that he was always conscious of a catch in his breath when

he started to speak to her. "Aren't you really tired?" he repeated.

"Why, yes," confessed Jane, gaily, "I am, rather! But I wish you'd talk about Mr. Dixon's tiredness, instead of mine! It's more important just now."

"Well, I like that!" ejaculated Tom. "Why, that wretched, feeble-minded, narrow-chested——"

"You watch him for a day or two," skilfully cut in Jane. She wisely refrained from protest, and contented herself with completely ignoring his vituperations,—a much more effectual method.

Tom did watch him, with the result that an evening or two later at a one-night stand, he came to Jane during an entr'act, and said curtly:

"You're right. Dixon wants to lay off for a week or two, when we can manage it. We'll carry him as excess baggage for a bit, and— See here: can your other child act at all?"

"Otho? I haven't the least idea!"

"Well, we'll try him out in a rehearsal at Pico on Monday. He seems to make a hit with Nettie. Maybe she can get him up in some scenes with her."

"Everybody for the second act—quick!" called Lyter, excitedly. "For God's sake, Brainerd, what are you doing anyway? I thought you were stage-managing this!"

Tom flushed resentfully, but, making allowances for Lyter's fatigue and financial harassments, hurried off about his duties without a word.

The curtain went up for the second act of their "musical comedy" which was something like the cheapest type of Bowery burlesque gone heart-breakingly wrong, and set to the music of an amateur minstrel club.

Gertie Mills and Jane, in abbreviated pink skirts, fox trotted onto the stage, singing the latest rag-time song hit, introduced in the effort to inject a little infectious, popular element into the show. Neither could sing, but Gertie danced with the technique of a veteran ballet pony, and Jane had the natural grace and lightness of an elf. The melody was catchy, and the meagre house applauded.

Lyter, standing in the wings with Tom, nodded and smiled, his irritability forgotten.

"She was a find, all right, that kid!" he said. "Get onto the way she's learned the ropes! Listen to her in those gag lines;—she's helping Gertie get the laughs and hold them like an old hand!"

"How is Lendrick doing?" asked Tom casually.

"Oh, suffering Moses! Don't *ask* me!" Lyter made a grimace. "He may be a musical genius,

but he can't play in a band for sour apples. As a musical comedy fiddler, he's a fine billiard player. If he is as good at selling ribbons as he is at this spieling, he ought to be able to hold down a department-store job nearly fifteen minutes!"

At the end of the show, Tom encountered Jane looking like a little lost ghost as she wandered among piles of scenery, dodging grouchy stage hands and heavy sets that were being stowed away.

"Otho was to come behind and fetch me," she told him anxiously. "What do you suppose is the matter?"

Tom could have given a shrewd guess, but he did not communicate his intuition. He sent Jane ahead with Mrs. Fanshawe, and went off on a round of investigation, carried on in accordance with his experience of Otho and his breed. He eventually found him in an exceedingly disreputable saloon near the railway station, and took him on board the train himself. Otho was perfectly willing to be put into his berth by almost anybody, so long as he got there. He went instantly to sleep.

Tom tossed the violin case (which he had rescued from under a table in an unsavoury back room)

into the section on top of him. Then he stood and looked at him somewhat grimly.

Otho's fair, handsome face was deeply flushed and stupid in expression. His disordered dress and rumpled, copper-coloured curls, gave him the look of a rather sordid young Bacchus.

"And she thinks she's going to marry him!" remarked Tom Brainerd to himself. "Oh, well, it's just that sort of pretty, sick-brained baby that women do take to, often enough!" He delivered himself of a savage sigh, and closed the curtains quickly.

The train had started, and the long lane of swaying curtains was blank and silent; everybody had turned in, for they got in at their next stop very early next morning. Tom looked up at the swinging lights, shedding their sickly saffron glow upon all things. How he loathed it all!

"I'd better go and tell her he's asleep," he murmured, rousing himself hastily. "If I don't, she'll come to tuck him in, I suppose!"

He made his way down the aisle, and stopped outside Jane's berth.

"Asleep?" he said cautiously.

Her voice came eagerly:

"Oh, no! Has Otho come on board?"

"Long ago! He beat the whole bunch on board the car, and turned in at once. He's snoring now. Go to sleep yourself, will you?"

"Right away, thanks. I wish I had Jab here with me! I worry about him when he's so far away."

"I'm going to the baggage car about something anyway," lied the weary Tom. "I'll make sure the little chap's all right for the night."

He tramped off, so tired that he could barely hold up his head, for all his strength and endurance.

In the baggage car, he had a heart to heart chat with the sympathetic Jabberwock, and made sure that he had fresh water and was as comfortable as he could be under the uncomfortable conditions.

"It's a rotten world, isn't it, old man?" he whispered, bending close to the little dog. "But there's one worth while thing in it, isn't there? And that's our Girl!"

Jab, reaching up to lick his cheek, said, "Yes!"

CHAPTER XII

IN PICO

Foul be the world or fair
More or less, how can I care?
'Tis the world the same
For my praise or blame,
And endurance is easy there.

ROBERT BROWNING.

THEY reached Pico at midday on Monday, with the sun blazing in a sky that had known no rain for three months, and the thermometer at a hundred and eight degrees.

You who read will probably never go to Pico. Its name, by the bye, is not quite that, but it is something like it. There may be other places precisely similar but I doubt if you could find them without some trouble. It is, I suppose, a village, but it is as unlike other villages—certainly Northern villages—as possible. There is nothing progressive about it but its luxuries; its comforts are a negligible quantity. In its main hotel, the Jewel House, you can get almost perfect food and un-

usually good wines,—but the rooms are merely the rooms of any fair country inn. The doors are ramshackle, the window-sashes obstinate, the hot water tepid, and “service” confined to one drowsy negro.

Climb the dingy stairs in the clean yet musty atmosphere peculiar to rustic hostelry; listen to the creaking and echoing plank floors beneath your impertinent tread; note the touching if somnolent willingness of the middle-aged “bell-boy” who brings you ice water with the refreshing sureness of conviction that in so doing he has fulfilled his fullest and highest obligations; you will feel convinced that you have come to a regulation country hotel of the rather better order. You will listen to the flies that buzz inside the fly screens and not outside; you will resignedly accept the time-honoured custom of window shades as to blowing outward instead of in; you will, in short, conceive the place to be neither better nor worse than other inns of its kind.

In the sweet summer dusk, then, you will descend to the dining-room, and doubtless will warily avoid the alluring items on the menu. You will assume them to be bluff pure and simple. How should a shabby little one-horse hotel boast a chef

capable of consummating the glories of *cêpes aux Bordelaises*, or a real alligator pear salad? You may perceive about you groups of surprisingly well-dressed people, but you imagine them transient motorists, and anachronisms in any case.

And then perhaps at midnight, you return to that dining-room and hesitatingly let yourself go, yielding to the graceful worldly gaiety of the place as you would to a metropolitan café. And you see charming frocks, and some very good jewels. You hear seductive music, and, if you have the taste and the price, you eat and drink exquisitely.

In the daylight hours, Pico has just one public automobile, and, as there are no street cars or stages of any sort, that lone chauffeur does a thriving business. But after nightfall the big touring cars begin to glide silkily into town. People living all over the neighbourhood—and neighbourhood is a pretty large and elastic word in the Sacramento Valley—blow in for late supper at the Jewel House. It is very pretty and very mondaine and very surprising. And then you are likely to climb upstairs afterwards to a hot water tap that will run any kind of water except hot, and a bell that is disposed to do anything but ring. Wherefore is Pico different from other places—a corner of the earth where

the impossible is the usual, and where everything is run according to a paradox.

Jane thought it the loveliest place she had ever seen, and doubtless it was. Southern California is a golden witch, with magic in her look and a siren lure in her voice. The real tropics are less dangerous to some temperaments: they are frankly sensuous and suggestive of peril. But the Sacramento atmosphere is as provocative as that of a sublimely sweet young savage, bent, though innocently enough, upon the business of breaking hearts.

So many things happened at Pico that in after years it was to separate itself from the jumbled confusion of one-night stands in a peculiarly distinct, even a peculiarly fateful manner.

Though they were not to spend the night there after the performance, the women hired a room for the day, with a bath as a crowning luxury, and took turns tubbing, lying down on the bed, changing their clothes, writing letters, or manicuring their nails. It was not the most restful way to rest—five women crowded into a small room with a single bed and two chairs, but it was infinitely better than waiting in the broiling railway station, and it was possible to get clean there, and a change,

if you were willing to await your turn and not to be a pig about it. And, divided up between them, it was cheap enough.

Mrs. Fanshawe fell asleep on the bed during the afternoon, and while Nettie washed her hair and read a magazine, Jane and Alice Cooke went forth to explore Pico. They headed first for the theatre. This was ostensibly to call for chance letters, and though they seldom found any it gave them something to do. Today Jane was looking forward anxiously to seeing Otho rehearse the small part which Lyter had rather dubiously given to him.

Poor Otho had not done very brilliantly so far. Though he loved his violin and had a delicate touch, his lack of training, and above all his temperamental ungraciousness in being criticized or ordered about, had not stood him in good stead. He was a musician by nature and could pick up things easily enough but he hated methodical practice and profoundly scorned the type of music he was expected to play.

Lyter did not like him; neither, of course, did Tom Brainerd, who was virtually Lyter's stage-manager half the time. But Tom was scrupulously careful to give him every chance. Though

he looked down on him, he did not propose to give Jane the opportunity of blaming him for personal animosity. He went out of his way to smooth Otho's path and to keep Lyter moderately amiable. But the manager reasonably objected to carrying unnecessary dead weight about upon his inadequate and impoverished shoulders.

"The kid's all right," he had said to Tom. "Jane's a good little thing, and rather taking when she's dancing,—I don't deny it. But why should I keep that dandified lout? I ask you—where's the good of him?"

It was through Tom's suggestion that they were going to rehearse Otho in Charlie Dixon's part of young lover opposite Nettie Llewellyn in a classic production entitled "Never too Late." The play was only being put on as an experiment and they were only going to give it "at wood piles" as Nettie expressed it. No one had much hope that Otho would make good. Nettie herself declared it very condescending on her part to even rehearse with him. But he was markedly handsome, Lyter's houses were rarely very critical, and the manager grimly decided that he could scarcely be worse than Dixon. The latter was growing more and more perceptibly worn and ragged with every

performance, and it really seemed only a matter of time when they would have to let him go.

The first reading rehearsal for Otho with Nettie had been called at Pico. The unusual heat and the uncertainty of Otho's Thespian talents had kept Lyter mercifully from calling the whole cast. He only wanted today to hear Otho read the love scenes with Miss Llewellyn, and to get an idea—to use his own sententious phrase—"whether he was as much of a lemon as he seemed to be!"

The company had accepted Otho as Jane's best young man, in a comfortable, no-questions-asked sort of way. At times incredibly vulgar, theatrical people of this class have an extraordinary sense of delicacy upon occasion. It was rare that any one referred to any suggestion of sentiment in that direction. So far as Tom was concerned, it is doubtful if any one ever suspected him of any serious feelings toward Jane.

For Tom was wise. From the moment that he had begun to understand Jane, and incidentally to love her, he had constituted himself her watchdog and guard. He permitted himself none of the traditional diffidence of his position; he looked out for her as he did all things, with a high hand and complete self confidence. If things interfered

with Jane's comfort or well-being he contrived to eliminate them; but there was nothing gallant about the way he did it, no suggestion of any of the softer emotions that might be influencing him. He took care of her—or so it appeared to the non-plussed onlookers—as he would take care of anything of a highly valuable nature. To Jane alone did he ever show that he thought of her in a different fashion from his thought of the rest of the world. He knew his theatrical business too well to permit a suspicion of sentimental interest.

Tacitly, Jane had been paired off with Otho in the minds of the company, though no one talked about it. It was one of those things that don't have to be said. But today in Pico, as she and Alice Cooke walked along the pretty but scorching street, Alice yielded to a sudden impulse and crossed precipitously the gulf which they themselves had fixed. She was a merry, honest-eyed girl, with a profusion of black hair and a florid complexion that looked quite well at night; Jane liked her.

"Say, Jeannette," she blurted out suddenly, "I wouldn't let my boy act with Nettie if I were you!"

Jane, who had long since been obliged to swal-

low "Jeannette" in spite of her detestation of nicknames, answered indifferently:

"Oh, what on earth does it matter? I want Otho to do something! And anyway I like Nettie."

"Oh,—well!" Alice raised her expressive dark eyebrows. "So do I like her! We all like her, if it comes to that. But when it comes to a good-looking kid like Otho Lendrick—why, Net's a regular vampire. It isn't her fault."

Alice put her hands together demurely, fixed her eyes in a baby stare, and hummed under her breath the refrain of a recent popular song:

"She can't help it—she can't help it—
She just can't let 'em alone!"

Jane gave no indication that she was jarred. Indeed she did not feel particularly so. Hers was not the coarseness of fibre that is either suspicious of or impervious to vulgarity. It was rather the supernal delicacy of balance which vibrates so truly to every changing breath that it comprehends and tolerates what a clumsier intelligence would shrink from.

She laughed now, her warm, friendly laugh, as free from spite as the California sky above them was free from clouds.

"I'm not worrying!" she declared with sweet slanginess. "I run about after the poor boy enough as it is without fastening an apron string a mile long on him! As for my being jealous—Fancy my being jealous of Otho!"

She laughed again, and Alice raised her eyebrows at the genuine ring of it.

"Well," said the other girl dryly, "it's no concern of mine, of course."

"No," rejoined Jane readily and eagerly, "it isn't indeed! That's what makes it so dear of you to take an interest!"

Alice stood still and stared at her, trying to grasp the fact that this extraordinary snub had been administered in the most cordial good faith, and in the full conviction that the administrator of it was paying her a compliment!

"Come—here is the theatre," she said, abruptly changing the subject.

In going into the playhouse, Jane felt that thrill of excitement that she still felt whenever she found herself behind the scenes. It was months since she had become a strolling dancer and player, and yet, in one sense, she was not used to it. She loved it, she was at home in the life, she was no longer afraid nor ill at ease, it was all a customary

thing, an old story to her, and yet—she could never take it quite as a matter of course!

Life would always be like that with Jane. Always the vision and the dream would remain with her after their legitimate term had expired. Always, when others began to tire, Jane's queer exploring spirit would leap up and rush even a little further, clamouring for the yet untried interests in whatever circumscribed path she travelled. For this truth had come to small Jane without being taught her in any concrete or recognizable form: every path, even the greatest, is circumscribed. Except for the different flowers and weeds on either side, and the variety of the occasional views, they are much the same. Even the high roads have their stones at intervals; even the by-ways know their happy stretches where one may go softly and pleasantly. But there is always the turn just ahead,—the cross-road that we will come to in a moment,—the valley that may hold who knows what buried treasure,—the mountain pass that will lead us into such undiscovered and perhaps undiscoverable countries as man knows in dreams!

Of course, there are burning pits too, and wild torrents of events, and irrationally appearing ice-

bergs on dry land; but who, with a spark of adventure in him, would say that this does not add to the interest of the expedition called Life?

When they got onto the barren and echoing stage, the rehearsal seemed to be already over. Nettie was putting on her hat.

Otho's face looked queer, Jane thought. It was pale and strained and his eyes were feverish. Poor boy! She could see that he was upset!

"Well," said Lyter, frowning and throwing down the prompt book, "it didn't go very well, I must say. It—I—well, I don't know what to say, and that's a fact."

He spoke vexedly. Lyter was rather a kind-hearted man, and moreover he was cowardly when it came to this sort of thing. He was entirely truthful when he stated that he did not know what to say.

Tom Brainerd did.

"The truth is, Lendrick," he said plainly, "you've not proved yourself any good as a fiddler, and you're no good as an actor unless——"

Otho hotly started to speak, and Tom put out his hand.

"Hold on! Never interrupt any one like that till you're dead sure they don't meant to do you a

good turn instead of a bad one. Mr. Lyter isn't firing you, Lendrick—yet."

Otho stood still looking down, but there was no humility in his pose or expression. Two red spots had begun to burn angrily in his face. Jane noticed that they made him look vaguely like Dixon, and wondered with a shudder if all good-looking young actors grew to look like that.

Tom shot an enquiring look at his chief, asked and received a cryptic sanction, and proceeded:

"I have talked it over with Mr. Lyter. We both know that you cannot do any very remarkable things either at music or acting, unless you work hard,—and I don't know what the chances are of your ever working hard. That, of course, is up to you. As it is, you are not much use to us. You aren't up to playing scenes with Miss Llewellyn, for instance. But if you want to stay with the show, and go on as a filler-in or extra, we'll pay your expenses. Also, you can have Mr. Dixon's parts occasionally when he doesn't feel up to appearing—provided you will take the trouble to learn your lines, which you evidently haven't done so far. Take it or leave it."

Otho straightened up, flaming.

"I know why you don't want me to play scenes

with Miss Llewellyn!" he cried with a heady rage that was all boyish and very foolish. "You're jealous!"

Tom Brainerd threw back his head and roared with laughter, and Otho nearly sobbed to hear him.

Jane stiffened and then shivered. Her sense of humour was not of that strain. She could have killed Brainerd for his careless brutality in laughing like that. . . . He was speaking.

"So that's it!" He had succeeded in stopping laughing. To Jane's horror, even Lyter was smiling a little; Nettie was giggling.

"Well," said Tom gravely, "you'd better talk that over with Mr. Lyter sometime. Maybe I *am* spoiling his show with my jealousy! How about it, sir?"

"Oh, chuck it, Tom!" growled Lyter. "A joke's all right, but this is a hot climate, and I want a bath before dinner."

"Well, how about your job?" Tom asked Otho with twinkling politeness. "Want it?"

All Otho's pride yearned to say, "No," but he was not an utter fool. He turned a uniform scarlet, and said, "Yes."

As he went out of the theatre, Jane's small hand was clutching his arm with loyal tenderness.

CHAPTER XIII

MISS L. MADDEN

No gift be mine that aside would turn
The human love for whose founts I yearn!

Keep, keep the gem that I still may trust,
Though my heart's wealth be but pour'd on dust!
Let not a doubt in my soul have place,
To dim the light of a loved one's face. . . .

Oh! give me no sway o'er the powers unseen,
But a human heart where my own may lean!

FELICIA HEMANS.

"OH, me!" sighed Alice, "I want a box of candy, some cigarettes, and a New York paper!"

"I'll try to get you all three when I take Jab out," said Jane.

She had waited until dusk to take the Jabberwock for his run. Now that the hurt leg had healed, he was no longer an object of sympathy but of annoyance. Lyter had several times been fairly frank in his dissatisfaction with the little dog's presence in the company. The thing was,

in fact, becoming more and more difficult and complicated. You might smuggle a small mongrel of polite behaviour on board one train—or two—or three. Coloured porters are not hard-hearted as a class, and player people are proverbially generous with tips. But that the procedure could go on for a whole trip was preposterous on the face of it. Even Tom, Jab's most faithful friend and ally, had intimated to Jane that the little dog was becoming a problem. That was some time back, and since then, Jab, as we have seen, had travelled in baggage cars to the great detriment of his health and temper.

Jane knew that she was silly to keep him with her at all. If she could find him a moderately comfortable home he would be far better off than as companion to her wanderings. For, as to her own future, Jane had no specific ideas; less than no plans. What she would do after the San Francisco season closed she had not the dimmest notion. Meanwhile, Jab was one of the chief anxieties of her life.

The question of caring for him between trips had become almost as momentous as his transportation. She made the poor dear as little conspicuous as possible, of course. In the days before he had been

consigned to the baggage car, he had been hidden even in a travelling bag on occasion. Now, when she took him to walk she did so under cover of darkness when it was possible. It was truly dreadful to have this sense of guilt regarding her best friend!

Obviously, Jab himself felt the weight of the situation. He crept stealthily forth from his various hiding places in an anxiously discreet way that went to Jane's heart, and he had entirely given up such assertive habits as barking!

When Jane started with him from the Jewel House at Pico, she felt more depressed than usual. Without putting the thing into cruel words, she felt that the little trio was, taken all in all, an encumbrance on the company. Not she herself; her natural gift for dancing and in a measure acting, had expanded like a rose under even this crude training; she was pretty certain that she was a help rather than a hindrance. But with her appendages it was all too different. It was obvious that neither Otho nor Jab had made themselves valuable nor pleasant to Lyter.

With the entire absence of egotism which was so signal and so astounding a trait in Jane, she felt desperately distressed and guilty over their fail-

ure to make good. Who if not she was responsible?

She took Jabberwock down an inconspicuous alley and away from the main throughfare. Then on a modest parallel street, she strolled along—one simply could not walk fast in that atmosphere—under the caressing shadows of the trees. It was really evening by now, and the little shops were full of lights. A breeze full of subtle Southern perfumes drifted across her hot forehead. With a Jane-like carelessness of her appearance, she pulled off her shabby little travelling hat, and lifted her face to catch the passing illusion of coolness.

It was then that she chanced to see a sign:

"Miss L. Madden.

"Dogs, Confectionery, Cigars and Clairvoyant."

It was a quaint combination. Jane stood and smiled at it, thinking:

"She ought to have put 'Canines' instead of dogs, and made the alliteration complete!"

The second and third items reminded her of Alice Cooke's desires, and, followed by Jab, she entered the shop.

It was a crowded little place, not unlike a small junk shop. It was clear, after the most superficial glance, that Miss L. Madden dealt in even a larger and more motley assortment of merchandise than was intimated in her surprising advertisement. Second-hand books were evidently an important branch, for there were many shelves full of them,—the most patently second-hand assortment Jane had ever seen, and exceedingly dusty. There was a counter of “Notions” besides the dim glass case full of candies which looked too ancient to buy for Alice. The whole place was like a fragment of Dickens—something exaggerated and yet real, fantastic and yet squalid enough. The proprietress, coming slowly forward to meet the customer, supplied the final touch of oddity.

Miss L. Madden was a dwarf. She was not more than three feet and a half in height, but her head was the size of a normal head, and thus out of all proportion. Her eyes were prominent, rolling, and very bright and black, like the eyes of a large bird. There was a froggish look about her mouth, and her hands were thin and pale and shaped like claws. She was clothed in a pink gown cut with extravagant gaiety, and her dull black hair was elaborately curled and dressed high

on her head. There was a cherry-coloured ribbon standing out from the pretentious coiffure with an absurd irrelevance, like a bow on a piece of furniture.

"Well?" she chirped quickly and sharply.

Jane jumped at the suddenness of the salutation.

"I—have you——" She did not dare buy the murderous looking candy, but the cigarettes might be better; she mentioned Alice's favorite brand. Miss Madden hunted for it in a preoccupied way. It was evident that she did not know much about her own stock, for after a short and futile search, she shrugged her already hunched shoulders, and said indifferently: "I can give you some very good cigars—that is, unless I sold the last day before yesterday. I'm sure I don't remember."

"I don't want any cigars!" smiled Jane. "Do you ever get newspapers from the North?"

The dwarf shook her head, in the same absent-minded way. She seemed to care very little about making a sale. Her eyes were fixed on Jab, and Jane saw the light of the true dog-lover in her eyes.

"What a nice little fellow—your young friend!" she said. "Did you bring him to call on my sons and daughters? My sons and daughters are

fond of company, but they are sometimes rather rough, and I notice your friend limps a trifle."

Jane smiled again; she liked the expression "your young friend," as applied to Jab. "Where are your sons and daughters?" she asked. "I am sure they won't hurt him. Jab is very good with children."

She wondered vaguely at the prefix "Miss," since there were sons and daughters, but decided that it was a sort of professional title.

Miss L. Madden laughed, a sharp, dry, curious laugh, that was really and literally like the Biblical thorns crackling under the pot.

"Come and see my sons and daughters!" she said abruptly. "I like you."

She led the way through the overcrowded little shop and opened a door at the back. Jane and Jab followed her through.

They stood in a long, dim room, lighted only by two fat candles in tin candlesticks on a table. The air became immediately filled with the clamour of dogs voicing either welcome or resentment; they made so much noise it was difficult to say which.

Jab cocked his long ears interestedly. It was long since he had heard the voice of his own kind, and who knows what this outburst may have said

to his intelligence? Suddenly he gave a shrill little bark in answer. Jane laughed delightedly.

"That's the first time he has barked in three months!" she told Miss L. Madden.

"Hurt?"

"Yes, but he's all right now, only for that tiny limp. He doesn't get that except when he's stiff being kept shut up too long."

Miss Madden sighed. "Ah, it does depress them to be shut up. I have a back yard for mine."

"I wish I had! You see, the people I'm with don't care for dogs as much as I do."

Miss Madden's eyes flashed.

"Disgusting imbeciles!" she exclaimed angrily. "In their next incarnation, they will be beetles and bugs, and people will step on them and squash them! Ha, ha!"

She seemed to take as malevolent a satisfaction in this theosophical outlook as though she personally were going to thus transform them to beetles and bugs and then administer the punishment herself.

"I believe she's a witch!" thought Jane. Aloud she said: "But where are your children?"

Her strange hostess treated her to another of the crackling laughs.

"All around you!" she returned, waving a short

arm. "Didn't you hear them say, 'Good-evening, Mamma,' when I came in?"

Jane saw then that the walls of the room were lined with small cubicles, with netting across the front, such as are seen at dog shows. Behind the netting were dogs innumerable; big dogs, little dogs, ugly dogs, pretty dogs; old, wheezing dogs and exuberant fat puppies.

"They are my sons and daughters," explained Miss Madden with real satisfaction. "And I'm sure they're more comfort to me, and more of a credit to me too, than the usual kind!"

The last words were spoken with a slight note of defiance, and she looked at Jane with a searching wistfulness. Jane divined at once that she was afraid of being laughed at for her whimsical and rather pathetic fancy. Jane would not have been Jane if she had not been touched. She smiled understandingly and said, entering into Miss L. Madden's fantastic spirit:

"And then it must be fun to pick out your children yourself, and have just exactly the kind you want!"

The dwarf woman laughed with evident pleasure, though the sound was as harsh as before, and her black eyes were without gaiety.

"You understand!" she said. "Listen—I'll tell you a secret. I buy and sell dogs—at least I am supposed to—but—I hardly ever sell any at all! I can't bear to! I care for them too much, and they are so attached to me. It would be cruel, that's what it would be—cruel!" repeated Miss Madden, with one of her sudden bursts of fierceness.

As though she had all at once thought of something, she turned on Jane with an extraordinarily clear glance out of her prominent black eyes.

"I am something of a witch, you know," she said. "You may have gathered that from the word 'Clairvoyant.' People are so fussy about words these days, but it all means the same thing. I tell people's characters—yes, and fortunes too, in my own way! Let me see!"

She studied Jane for a moment attentively.

"Shall I tell you what I see in you?" she demanded abruptly. "It won't cost you anything. Shall I?"

"Yes, do," said Jane gently.

She was sorry for the odd little creature, and moreover something fantastic about her and about the place and the moment, caught her imagination.

Miss Madden nodded without speaking, and led

her along between the dogs' cubicles, to still another door. Opening this, she ushered Jane into a dull, plain little room more like an office or antechamber than a place where any one actually lived. Yet a hideous lamp shade proclaimed it a parlour, and there was a red knitted shawl hanging over the back of a chair. Miss Madden put it about her shoulders, and the effect of its dingy scarlet with the pink gown and the cherry bow made Jane's flesh creep. Obeying a wave of her hostess's short arm, she sat down opposite her, and Jab clambered into her lap.

"You are a psychic," the dwarf woman said, fixing her eyes on Jane's.

The girl's wide and wayward reading had brought her into sundry fields of metaphysics and occultism, though they had never appealed to her profoundly. She was too much a lover of humanity in its simple material phases to care much for the more mystic aspects of people and things. That there was something in her of unusual spiritual power she did not yet truly recognize. She did not know herself because she did not think about herself.

Jane had a surprisingly large and just comprehension of those with whom she came in contact,

but she had no more interest in or analytical knowledge of her own personality than of Thibet. The word "psychic" applied to herself made her smile as at an incongruity.

"Oh, no!" she assured Miss L. Madden. "I'm a most commonplace person—truly I am!"

But Miss Madden shook her head.

"You are a psychic," she repeated positively. "I am never mistaken. Your aura is very distinct; I can feel your vibrations almost immediately. You will be able to do great things when you have loved. That is to come."

She spoke in the monotonous undertone affected by occultists the world over, whether gipsy palmists or spiritualistic mediums, students of metaphysics or astrologers, esoteric philosophers or crystal gazers.

"But—but"—Jane protested, "I do love some one. I am going to be married."

Again the dwarf shook her head.

"It has not come!" she reiterated. "When it comes it will be stronger, more a living force in you than in most women."

She closed her eyes and muttered to herself. Jab gave a subdued sniffing sigh, as though he were indefinitely troubled or frightened. It was

very dim in the bare little back room; the atmosphere was suffocating. It was not only the heat that was oppressive; Jane was acutely conscious of something else.

"A strong man, a domineering man," murmured the clairvoyant. "He will arouse your emotional self. He is an old soul like you, though he does not guess it. He is struggling through a belt of materialism. He is your mate; a strong, relentless man. . . ."

Jane smiled inwardly, thinking this rather a singular description of Otho. For the moment she did not think of any one else. Then she started, and unconsciously her face flamed.

The dwarf's eyes were still closed.

"The strong, dark man"—she muttered.

"Why do you say he is dark!" Jane broke in, almost petulantly.

Miss Madden opened her eyes.

"Did I say he was dark?" she said vaguely. "Very odd! A clairvoyant is rarely conscious of what she says while in a trance. Did I tell you anything about yourself?"

"You said I was a 'psychic.'"

"Ah! did I give you any advice—under inspiration? No? Well, I have some to give you now.

I am not under control, but I can see—many things!”

She looked deeply into Jane's eyes, and her gaze was still misty as though from looking at visions a long way off.

“To nearly all the world,” she said, “I would say, be more generous, give more! To you I say—give less! To the others, have more trust! To you I say—trust seldom! You will always give too much, and trust too much. Wait for the great love that awaits you; develop your psychic power. That will give you the key to much that is denied ordinary people. And do not be generous with your love or your trust!”

“I have always loved people,” said little Jane. “And I could not live at all if I did not trust. And”—she smiled—“I don't believe I should care about being a psychic. It sounds cold and lonely, somehow. I don't want to sit up on some sort of a star and see people through a telescope; I want to be down with them wherever they are! I don't want anything ever that the people I love can't have.”

The dwarf woman nodded. “Of course,” she said. “You would feel just so.” She seemed to consider something carefully before she spoke

again. "Always," she went on, "you will give too much. You give, as others breathe, naturally and by necessity. I am not sure it is generosity, nor any particular credit to you. You give not merely because you like to, but because you have to. If you stopped giving, you would die."

She stared at Jane with a singular intentness. The door into the passage way had blown open, and from without came, from time to time, a puppy's whine, or the sigh of one of the older dogs, dreaming of older troubles. The lamp with the hideous shade flared and dimmed in the draught; out of the guttering shadows Jane spoke, smiling:

"Well, so far, I have had very little to give!"

The dwarf woman shook her head slowly.

"You would not know," she said. "People who give never know. If they know, it is not a gift, it is a loan—at interest."

She began to rock back and forth, again muttering.

"Small and yet straight"—she broke out, in a fitful fashion as though the power of words were sporadic and she would soon be dumb; "with wisdom in her face, clean young wisdom with an old soul behind it. . . . Is she to be overcome by the blind cruelty of the world? Will it spoil her?"

"I hate cruelty," Jane said, "more than anything."

The dwarf woman nodded.

"That," she answered, "is why you will have to meet it everywhere. The world is cruel. You are made to live and suffer in the world; therefore you will meet cruelty."

"I would rather die!" said Jane, with a curious vehemence.

"Naturally!" said the dwarf woman, and she spoke now in a tired voice. "There is always something that we would rather die than do—that's why we have to do it. Look at me, for instance:—I would far rather die than live; but they tell me I have extraordinary vitality."

There was nothing left of the trance-like mood of the last few minutes. Jane looked at her as though she saw her in a new light. There was tragedy about the dwarfed figure. Something sadder and darker than eccentricity looked out of those black eyes. They were piercing once more, but they were not unkind. . . .

"Will you take care of my dog for me?" said Jane in a low voice. "I had meant to—to hire some one to do it, for I am travelling, and I can't

take him with me. But I dreaded it! Will you take him? I don't dread leaving him with you."

"Thank you," said the dwarf woman at once. "He is a dear little dog. And he will remind me of you. When will you come back for him?"

"When I can—oh, just as soon as I can!" returned poor Jane, whose heart was breaking at the thought of giving him up. "And—won't you please tell me—about how much you think he will cost you a week?"

"It will cost *you*," answered Miss L. Madden, "a trip back to Pico to claim him. My dear, you were made to give; there is no use trying to cheat your destiny by making it a matter of money. You are giving me what I suppose is your dearest possession; which is to say, you are giving me your trust. If you try to pay me, it won't be a gift. It will just be an investment!" declared this curious dwarf.

CHAPTER XIV

OTHO'S MISTAKE

We know not where we go, or what sweet dream
May pilot us through caverns strange and fair
Of far and pathless passion. . . .

All is not lost! there is some recompense
For hope whose fountain can be thus profound. . . .

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

NETTIE LLEWELLYN, in spite of her surface artificiality, was of the true cave-girl type. She had profoundly the instinct of self-preservation, and brains enough to fortify that instinct.

Her temperamental quality, such as it was, she also used as an asset, or pawn, in her game of life. She had the shrewdness of the primitive, prehistoric woman, who, forced to pit herself against both man and the elements, learned to conquer both, if not by force at least by strategy and feminine wit.

Nettie is an inevitable figurehead of her class and of her times. There are still,—the devil permit-

ting,—women to whom life is only a grim game, to be played as propitiously as may be. And sex, and love, and other things of that ilk, being their most important holdings, are used by such women as pieces in the game,—and with a heart-rending skill worthy of a nobler exercise.

Nettie knew that her sway over Tom Brainerd was weakening. She would not, probably, discard Brainerd as long as he held to her, but a curious age-old instinct prompted her to provide for herself without waiting for the Lord to do so.

Otho attracted her, and she recognized in him a certain virginal eagerness of emotion highly interesting to a woman of her type. She had no wish to do him harm, nor any realization that she could do so by waking his dormant emotions. But it is not to be denied that she did play upon his sensitive temperament not well, but too wisely.

It all came to a climax one night, after the performance at Pico, the company had late supper at the Jewel House before going to their train.

Jane ate with Mrs. Fanshawe, who was apt to be left to her own devices and lonely in consequence, and Nettie and Otho sat together. The boy was excited and upset by a combination of conflicting feelings. He had been humiliated by his failure

in the scenes with Nettie that afternoon in the theatre, and his mortification made him more reckless than usual. His head was never very strong, and tonight he drank more than he could easily stand. He was not drunk, but he was in a state far from normal, and not accountable for his own thoughts or impulses.

And Nettie flirted with him,—rather crudely, a more experienced man might have said, but Otho was not experienced. He found her very fascinating, and grew quite boyishly ardent,—absurdly so, Nettie told him. She was of that feline type which scratches and caresses alternately, and she did not scruple to administer ridicule just as deliberately as she administered flattery.

Tom, who was at a table with two of the other men, watched the pair sardonically. He knew Nettie well enough to be able almost to recite, at this distance, the words she was saying. Every glance, every turn of her blonde head, was a definitely recognized and well-seasoned weapon in her armory. Tom gave a faint, cynical smile as he saw young Lendrick flush and glow under the unaccustomed attack.

Then Tom looked at Jane, wondering with a sudden sobering compunction, how she was taking

it. She was talking quietly yet happily with the old lady at her side, and did not seem to notice anything in the world at large to disturb her. She caught Tom's eyes, and smiled at him her eager, friendly smile, though there was just a hint of sadness in it. He rightly divined that it was the loss of Jab which had put that look there,—she had told him about it during the performance. He saw that it had nothing to do with Otho, though he and Nettie sat at the table next to her.

Brainerd deliberately rose and walked over to Miss Llewellyn's side. Otho looked up quickly, with instant unreasoning resentment. Nettie looked up too, but not with resentment. In her brown eyes came a light. She was not subtle, and Tom's interference at this juncture could mean to her only one thing,—that he was jealous.

"Shall I take you to the car, Net?" Brainerd asked, carelessly enough, but with a friendlier and more familiar note in his voice than she had heard from him of late.

"Surest thing you know!" she responded with alacrity. "Starting now, Tom?"

"Yes. I thought we'd cop this lone buzz wagon before the rest of the bunch. Come on."

With a smile and nod to Otho, and no further

leave-taking, she rose and went out of the dining-room.

He sat there, crimson with annoyance and chagrin. They all treated him like a child, these detestable, ill-bred, third-rate people! No one took him seriously! He reflected, with a growing sense of grievance, that even Jane talked to him often as though he were only an irresponsible little boy,—Jane who was going to marry him!

He looked at Jane, as she talked to Mrs. Fanshawe. As he looked, the resentment died out of his flushed young face, and a glow as warm but softer came into his eyes. How pretty Jane had grown! Odd, he thought, that he had not noticed it all these months. He realized now that he had been so absorbed in the strangeness of the new life that he had drifted into the habit of leaving Jane more and more alone. What nonsense, when they were to be married some day! And it would be rather sweet to be married to Jane,—the new Jane with the shimmer on her hair and the charming merriment in her smile, and the novel graces which she seemed to have developed imperceptibly,—and which looked particularly desirable through the glamour of his mood. He got up, after a minute, and went out alone.

If Jane had noticed him at all, she certainly paid no attention to him. She was busy having Mrs. Fanshawe's thermos bottle filled with hot coffee for the next morning, and a huge coloured waiter was hanging on her directions more reverently than if they had been those of his boss.

On Christmas, when they reached the dreary theatre where they were booked to play two performances by way of spending the holiday, Jane had found Mrs. Fanshawe enquiring more wistfully than usual for letters. She had learned that the old lady had several sons and daughters scattered over the world, and had hoped that at Christmas some one or the other of them might remember her existence. Sheer motherly folly, of course, for she had a good, practical, working knowledge of the serpent's tooth before this! Unnecessary to state, there were no letters. Jane had told the others about it, and they had all chipped in and presented her with a really gorgeous vacuum bottle, "As a slight token of our profound admiration and respectful affection!" Jane had worded the message upon the card, and had chosen the phrases which she felt sure would most appeal to the veteran actress. The bottle had been Mrs. Fanshawe's chief joy ever since, and she bore it

about with her everywhere, with a touching dignity, as though it were a decoration.

When they reached the station in Pico where they were to take the train for their next stop,—somewhere in Oregon,—they could see no sign of a car.

“Theatrical folks?” drawled a yard man between yawns. “You car’ll go on the 2.16, I reckon. Up the track a piece.”

In twos and threes as they dribbled in on foot or in the too popular automobile, they trooped up the track. The car was on a siding far enough away from the station to give them something the feeling of coming upon an uninhabited cabin on a lonely prairie.

A sleepy porter, rather the worse for the long wait and the consequent and continual need of refreshment, was sitting on the steps of the car. Dixon and Fench threw him into a bank of poppies, whence he emerged genially. The negro porter of the Southwest is probably the most genuinely and impressively philosophical creature alive. The condition has yet to be met, or the abuse invented which will really disturb him. Accepting the vicissitudes of life in the fatalistic spirit inevitable to one accustomed to Southern and Western trains,

and looking upon all who ride in them as necessarily mad, it is impossible to ruffle him. He is your master, wherever you meet him.

The company piled into the car, most of them too tired to file out again into the glorious moonlight. The sleeper was atrocious. Not more than two out of every five ventilators would open. Even a few of the windows were, apparently, hermetically sealed, and the whole car smelled stuffy. But the people who came into that unsavoury and uncomfortable resting place were beyond the point of cavilling. They crawled almost tearfully, into the suffocating holes allotted to them, and tried to console themselves with the thought that it would be cooler in Oregon.

A shriek of despair,—an old tired shriek,—rose from Mrs. Fanshawe's section. The thermos bottle had rolled out of her berth, and the glass lining was irretrievably smashed.

"In this climate I shall die without my breakfast coffee!" moaned the old lady, her stoicism utterly crushed.

"It won't be this climate, by breakfast time!" Jane comforted her sensibly. "We'll get to Red Cliff early in the morning,—won't we, porter?—in time for breakfast?"

"No telling, Miss," rejoined he, with that gloomy joy known to his race whenever imparting tidings of great sorrow, as of great joy. "Last run, we was fo' hours late!"

In a stricken silence, too deep for complaint, the company retired. Half laughing, but pretty weary herself, Jane went out to get a glimpse and a breath of a clean and fragrant world before going to bed in that abominable sleeper.

Tom Brainerd was just getting into the car, and stood aside to let her pass. Under her arm she carried a camp-stool which she had found on the rear platform, and Tom looked at it with a faint frown.

"Going to stay out?" he asked with gruff disapproval.

"Only for a little while. It will be hours before the regular train takes us up,—and I don't feel a bit like sleeping."

He nodded and climbed into the car,—not without another backward glance which Jane did not see.

She went slowly down the length of the car in the moonlight, more utterly alone it seemed to her, than she had ever felt before. The actors appeared all to have gone to bed; not a light showed from a section window. The porter was doubtless asleep again. She walked on beyond the farthest end of

the car and there sat down on her camp-stool. Then being very tired indeed, she bent her head upon her hands. It was a blessed relief to sit down and rest all by herself for five minutes! She loved people, but sometimes she felt choked by so many close-crowding personalities. And she missed Jab.

In her ears was the universal hushed music of night,—though it struck her that it seemed more secret, more stealthy than the nocturnal sounds of the North. In her nostrils and lips was the smell and taste of something mysterious and delicious. Yet Jane felt deeply depressed—oddly so. It was not like her to lose her joyous faculty like this. Tonight the beautiful moonlit world rested her weary nerves, but did not make her more glad.

She thought of Otho, and her heart grew heavier. It was not the mere fact of his failure that worried her: it was his attitude in regard to it and to all things. He had no real ambition,—only the desire to be successful and acclaimed, which is quite a different matter!

Jane sighed heavily, and lifted her head to drink in the indescribable wonder of the moonlight.

She had heard much of the moon of California, and had imagined that it would, of course, be very

bright indeed and very beautiful. She had never dreamed how bright and beautiful, because no one ever dreams that. That the pale and distant orb'd maiden should draw so close to earth that one could scarcely face her dazzling gaze, so close that one could feel her warm and perfumed breath, so close that one could recognize her as no cloistered virgin but a glorious and wanton queen without her veil,—such reckless imagery had naturally never crossed her mind.

When Tom Brainerd had told her that she could read a newspaper by moonlight in the Sacramento Valley, she had almost laughed at him. He was always boasting of California, for he adored her, and spoke of her in a tone as proprietary as though she were a beloved mistress. But he had made good his boast. In the pocket of the dust coat she wore Jane had a folded magazine. She drew it out and letters on the printed page flashed plainly into view. By one of those coincidences that are so common that playwrights scorn to use them, what she read was a cheap little lyric crudely but closely appropriate to the moment:

*Shall I be alone where the night is,
Where the scents of the night are round me?*

*Where the friendly, heavenly light is,
—Where the winds of the night have found me?
Nay, in the world I have come to guess
In the crowds alone is loneliness!*

Jane smiled to herself. "I suppose it's awfully bad poetry," she said to herself. "But it's dead true!" She read on:

*Shall I be alone where the stars are,
When the comforting sky is near me?
Where neither triumphs nor wars are,
But only a song to cheer me?
Nay, solitude which heals and mends
Gives me companionship and friends!*

. . . Just as she was thinking of herself as being utterly alone in this wonderful, moonlit, golden world, as isolated, in spite of the crowded, quiet car, as she might have been in a forest hut, she heard a faint sound and turned.

Otho was standing beside her.

"Otho,—go to bed!" she exclaimed, her maternal concern uppermost. It was all very well for her to lose her sleep looking at the moon, but it was quite another matter for Otho.

But he shook his head and came closer. His

look was not one that Jane had ever seen upon his face. His nerves and senses, unduly excited in unwonted ways were taking their revenge by now mastering him wholly. He was not himself at that moment, though it would have been hard for little Jane to comprehend in just what way. As he met her eyes, something savage in him leaped to the conviction that Jane loved him,—Jane always would love him! . . .

Otho was not conscious of a wanton wish to hurt her. The thing that urged him has urged many a better man before him. Only Otho was not big enough to withstand the urge; some men are.

As he slipped to his knees beside her, Jane was conscious of a great throb of tenderness, but it was not happy tenderness; it was an aching thrust into her heart,—an impulse compounded of pity, and service, and protection, and unselfishness, but untouched by passion. She felt her boy's arms around her, and laid her hand upon his head, but pain lay heavy upon her spirit.

In Jane was the sacrificial instinct developed even more strongly than in most women. Candida intimated that she held her virtue at no higher value than a cloak with which she would willingly shield any one whoreally needed it. Our Jane

was made of such stuff as that. She did not strictly understand what virtue was: if she had, she doubtless would have considered it a sweet and precious thing, but to be used, like other sweet and precious things, for the help and service and comfort of those she loved. And love was at once a greater and a smaller word to Jane than to most persons. Her limitation was that, from a sex standpoint, she knew nothing about love; her unique triumph lay in the high and selfless urge of tenderness in her which opened wide the doors of her heart to a troublesome world of men and women.

"Jane," whispered Otho, in the broken tone which, by its very brokenness drives straighter to the heart of woman than the most ardent demand—"there's nothing left but you,—nothing but you, my dear, my dearest!"

"Don't say such a foolish thing, honey!" Jane murmured patting him very much as she was used to pat Jab, and cuddling his curly head in the hollow of her shoulder. Never had he been so heartbreakingly dear as at that moment in his weakness, the pathetic, disconcerting weakness of men when they are as children before the women who love them.

With a deep-drawn breath that was half a sob he put his arms around her as he knelt, and drew her closer and closer to him. Save for the quiver that she felt go through him, there was nothing to warn her. But that strange tremor, like the shiver of the earth before an earthquake, the ripple of the lake before a squall,—the lightning shimmer across the sky that heralds a thunderstorm,—that, for some reason set her heart to beating, and quickened her automatic subconscious senses—for what?

She could not know what it was for which Nature was instinctively and mechanically marshalling her forces. . . . Yet she was not surprised,—nay,—she found it unaccountably natural, when Otho breathed against her neck:

“Jane! I’ve only you,—and you love me! What’s the use of stupid rules? . . . You’re going to be my wife sometime—what does anything else matter? . . . Jane, I love you so,—I want you so,—and there’s no reason why not,—no reason at all. . . . No one will ever know except just us . . . just us. . . . And it will be such a dear secret between us,—just like being married all by ourselves, with no one else knowing! . . . Jane, you’re such a little saint that you don’t know what I’m talking about! But lean

down—closer, Jane,—and let me kiss you—and I'll make you understand. . . . I've only realized it all just lately, but now I know it's the only thing. . . . Little Jane!—Darling girl—darling girl. . . .”

He drew her very close and his lips found hers,—a very different kiss from that first one in the Northern moonlight at the cross-roads. Jane seemed to see those old shadows,—herself and him,—as though from a great distance.

“How young they are,—how very young, and sweet, and happy!” she found herself whispering half aloud. That young couple were strangers to her tonight. . . .

The mist with its picture of the past faded, and there was Otho's face white with passion close to hers, and the hot golden moonshine was pouring down upon them through the heavily scented air.

“Jane,”—muttered Otho hoarsely,—“you won't throw me adrift? If I haven't you—haven't you entirely—I don't know what will become of me. I'm only human—and I love you,—I love you!”

“You damned coward!”

Tom Brainerd's voice was as violent as the blow which he just restrained himself from giving. He

stood over them, breathing heavily and harshly, his fists clenched. Jane, pale and startled but with the one thought of shielding Otho from this mastering wrath, stretched out her hands appealingly as she sat there on the camp-stool. Tom put them aside gently, but with fingers that shook.

"Go into the car, and go to bed!" he said, in a tone that Jane had never heard before. It was a yearning voice, a sorry voice, but there was a sort of rasp in it, whether of anger or pain she could not know.

She stood shivering a moment; then she touched his arm. Otho was on his feet, motionless, as though turned to stone. For a moment he stood so, then threw up his head defiantly, and walked quickly away. Tom would have followed him, but Jane's hand upon his arm held him.

"Don't be angry with him, please," she said, speaking with difficulty but very simply.

"Angry!" He looked at her oddly.

"Don't call him a coward, I mean. You don't understand. You see," Jane said, "I care for him so much—so much that I think I would do anything for him. . . ."

"Don't you see," said Tom Brainerd, almost with a sob, "*that's* why he's such a coward?"

CHAPTER XV

AT THE GATEWAY

. . . Yours is a thoroughbred heart: you don't scream and cry every time it's pinched.

G. B. SHAW.

"JEANETTE," said Nettie Llewellyn, as they were doing their hair in the car dressing-room preparatory to arriving in San Francisco, "when we get to 'Frisco, how'll we manage?"

It was late in the evening and the trip had been a hard one; both girls looked tired to death, and Nettie had been repairing ravages with a rouge-box and powder-puff. Jane, carefully collecting spilled hairpins from the bottom of a handbag, looked up absently.

"Manage? Manage about what?"

"Living. It isn't like one-night stands, or even a week stand. We can't double up for any length of time in a hotel room, and it would be too expensive to get separate quarters. Don't you want to go in with me? We could hire a little box of a flat somewhere, and be awfully cosy."

"Why,"—Jane hesitated, but, on the whole, the idea was by no means a bad one. "I don't make much, you know," she objected doubtfully. "Maybe I couldn't pay my share."

"Rubbish!" retorted Nettie, craning her neck to see the effect of her back hair in the mirror. "I didn't intend to go to the Bellevue, my love! I'm proposing that we take a tiny flat somewhere,—Tom can tell us about locations,—he knows 'Frisco like a book. I bet he was born on the Barbary Coast!—Here, honey, put this rouge in the bag quick, before those other cats come in! Some one's at the door!"

Jane, considering, came to the conclusion that it decidedly would be best to go to live with Nettie for the time being. By degrees, the thought of marrying Otho had receded farther and farther in her brain until it now had become a sort of indefinite background which did not materially affect her immediate plans nor actions. Not that she had given it up, only there seemed less and less reason for being concerned about it at present. Life was interesting enough without marrying anyway. . . . When she felt this way she stopped herself, a bit shocked by her own selfishness as she was fain to call it. How did it happen that she was grow-

ing so careless about becoming Otho's wife? Was she indeed careless of his destiny, indifferent to it, because of a widening horizon and a deepening experience? A million times no! Otho was as dear to her as ever,—dearer, indeed, since she had learned more of his weaknesses and limitations of temperament and spirit.

The dressing-room intruder was only Alice in search of a glass of water, and when Jane and Nettie were alone again, Jane said suddenly:

"Can't you coach Otho so that he can act half way decently? I know you don't think he's any good as a leading man, and I dare say he's not, but I do think you could help him to do better if you liked, Nettie."

Nettie started.

"I—I suppose I could," she answered slowly. "Do you really want me to?"

"I want Otho to get on better than he has been doing," Jane said with a wrinkled brow. "I know he made an awful fizzle at Pico, but he's not stupid——"

"He is!" declared Nettie flatly and forcibly. "He's awfully stupid. He's a beautiful thing to look at, and any one would fall for him, but he is stupid!"

She hesitated, and then she turned to Jane with curiously bright and inscrutable eyes. "I think I prefer stupid men," she said quickly. "The other sort know too much,—they are too brutal."

She turned away abruptly, and gathered up gloves and handbag. "I will try to help him out a bit," she said casually, without looking at Jane. "There ought to be a good chance for all of us in 'Frisco. Lyter has got to play every card he has—and then some! There's a new play, with a part I think O—that is Mr. Lendrick,—might learn to do." "Oh, call him Otho!" laughed Jane. "He's only a boy!"

As she spoke she had a fleeting, uncomfortable memory of that night in Pico.

Nettie looked at her in a curious way.

"I believe that's all he is to you!" she said meditatively. "Don't you know that he's nearly as old as Tom Brainerd?"

It was Jane's turn to stare a bit.

"Oh, well—!" she said with a half laugh. "I dare say that's so as a matter of years. But somehow—I always think of Mr. Brainerd as a *man* . . . Don't you?"

Without answering, or even turning her face in her direction, Nettie Llewellyn slipped away.

There is a deep tunnel—deep and long—through which you go on entering San Francisco, Queen of Cities, Gateway of the Golden West, Door of a Thousand Wonders, Key to the Purple Seas that are so far West as to be pure East. That tunnel strikes the imaginative as a sort of black passage-way to the setting sun,—a gnome-built entrance-way to the place of magic. . . .

“When we get through the tunnel we shall be in San Francisco!”

What enchanting words! Jane thrilled to them each time she heard them. She knew intuitively how wonderful San Francisco was going to be. She felt already the majestic witchery of the most fascinating city in America. She could, in fact, hardly wait to get there: it seemed that she could breathe already the rich breath of the Pacific Ocean,—which is to other sea scents as the fresh strong smell of a tropical wild-flower to the sicklier perfume of a hothouse bloom.

As a rule she did not believe in giving in to eccentric moods or whims; but, when they spoke of the tunnel to which they were coming almost at once, Jane rose impulsively, and slipped out onto the platform of the train. She wanted to be alone and outside the car. She felt sure she could stand the

cinders and lack of air while passing through the thick dark passage. Inside, all the length of the train, the porter was already closing the ventilators. She could not bear going into the stronghold of the West in a hot stuffy car, under flaring yellow lights, among people who,—though perhaps pardonably,—were only interested in getting their trunks in due time.

Out on the platform of the rushing train she realized by the sudden pour of air about her that she had been just in time. The whole atmosphere had become thick and thunderous; her eyes closed spasmodically against the rain of cinders; her throat smarted chokingly, and she gasped trying to catch her breath. Through roaring blackness she was borne onward; the heavy air seemed literally to be torn in two in giant rents to let her through; the noise was abominable, unspeakable.

She leaned back against the body of the car, giddy with the swing of the train and with the breathless, gagging darkness. She knew with one part of her brain that in all probability it was no worse than other tunnels; but, perhaps because of the occasion, her imagination, and her fatigue, it seemed more frightening, more monstrous.

In truth, Jane was overwearied, and the few

minutes she spent battling for breath among the choking cinders of the great tunnel into San Francisco entirely exhausted her.

She felt herself suddenly caught up in some one's arms, and had a vague, sick feeling that it was none too soon.

"In just a moment I should have fallen off that platform, I think!" she said shakily, trying to laugh.

"Oh, my darling . . . !"

Tom Brainerd's clasp drew her upward and inward. She was lifted and held against his breast; she knew it was his face that pressed hers, though she could not see it. But he did not kiss her. She was not even afraid that he would. She rested in his embrace, utterly relaxed, with complete trust.

He quivered from head to foot, feeling her small body droop contentedly against his. Then he stiffened, and holding her gently, put her down. She never knew just what it cost him to speak.

"We're almost in, Jane," he said in a matter-of-fact way. "Come in and get your things on; Nettie is waiting for you."

His arm guided her gently till she was inside the car. Then he turned back abruptly and stayed

outside in the cinder rain until they steamed slowly into the garish lights of the San Francisco station.

Jane and Nettie, Alice Cooke and Gertie Mills went to a hotel together for the night. Mrs. Fanshawe, for once, had friends in the city and had gone to stop with them. The four girls were going to divide up, and next day they proposed to go flat-hunting. Alice and Gertie were going to live together for the six weeks' run, as Jane and Nettie were going to.

In their room, Nettie, busy in cold-creaming the dust and dirt of the trip out of her skin, discussed probable expenses and other plans.

"Gee! But that hot bath sounds like heaven!" she sighed luxuriously. "There's something about the chance of getting clean that makes me absolutely reckless. Talk about 'cleanliness being next to godliness'! Don't you believe it! When I hear a perfectly good hot bath like that running I don't care what I do! . . . Jeannette, telephone again, and find out whether they're sending up those sandwiches and the beer; and didn't you say you were taking milk?"

Jane was abstracted, and didn't talk much. She telephoned and ordered obediently, but she

volunteered very little speech. She was feeling most horribly unhappy: not simply blue,—unhappy! It was a bitter reaction from her mood of excited anticipation on entering San Francisco. She knew, she thought, what had caused it, and it was altogether a horrid reason.

She had counted on Otho's taking them to their hotel as a matter of course; but he had come hastily up to her as they all left the train, and explained that he and Dixon and Fench were going to a "men only" place over a saloon, which Fench had known for years. If she would telephone him in the morning, they could make a date for lunch or something.

Jane had acquiesced as a matter of course, but her heart had known a queer little twist, not usual for such a healthy and unselfish heart. For a long minute's pause, she had felt bitterness and hurt. She had learned, and Otho must have learned too, that girl actresses arriving in a strange city late at night (the station clock was striking midnight when they got in) were liable to face inconveniences, if not actual hardships and perils. More than once she and the other girls had walked long blocks in the small hours in search of rooms they could afford. Once they had wandered into such

an unsavoury part of an unfamiliar town at 2.30 A.M. that they had only gotten back to safe, well-lighted ground again through the offices of a kindly and fatherly policeman.

The policeman on that occasion had gone home to his own children with something like a prayer on his lips, but Otho, who was supposed to love Jane, had been only superficially interested when he heard about it. Since the incident at Pico, he had been just a shade ill at ease with Jane, in spite of her loving good-comradeship which seemed to defy his remembering anything embarrassing or unpleasant. She had, so far as one could guess, forgotten the whole matter, and perhaps Otho, in his grandly egotistical manner, might have done the same, if it had not been for Tom Brainerd. But Otho knew well that Tom had never trusted him since that night, and had never ceased watching him. So he was conscious of a vague dissatisfaction with Jane and things in general. Himself was the only person who never annoyed him!

Jane, who usually understood people, did not understand him now. He was still, whatever his wrongdoings or shortcomings, her charge: Otho, the boy genius she had chosen to love and care for. It almost broke her stout little heart to have him

put her aside with so little compunction. It was not, curiously, Otho's indifference to her well-being that hurt her most: it was paramountly the thought that, apparently, she was not profoundly necessary to him. . . .

"Jeannette, you look like a little banshee,—so tired and white and dreary!—Did you hear what I was saying a minute ago?"

"Not a word!" admitted Jane, forcing a laugh.

"I was talking about what fun we'd have when we'd got our own place!" said Nettie, lighting a cigarette. "You're a regular little brick, you know. I'm lucky to have you with me!"

"I'm glad too," said Jane cordially; but her heart was still heavy. Never had she felt so lonely.

Nettie, half undressed, fidgeted with her comb and brush. Clearly there was something more which she wanted to say, but which she found difficult if not trying to put into words.

"About the flat, now," she began, hesitatingly.

"Yes?" Jane tried to feel interested.

"I'll tell you the truth, Jeannette," said Nettie, uncomfortably and defiantly. "We girls who decide to live together have to have a sort of—a sort of—I don't know how to say it exactly. I mean

something to protect us, even against each other. A kind of—of general rule, you know.”

“A code?” suggested Jane, who, as has been mentioned, had read a good deal.

“I expect it’s something like that. It’s—well, it’s about the only way we can get along at all.” Nettie twisted about in a self-conscious way that reminded Jane of her sister Theodosia. “There’s nearly always a point, Jeannette, where you’ve just got to—live and let live. It’s nobody’s business but your own what you care to do. Now,—take us, for instance! I know that you and Otho Lendrick are—sweethearts—so you may be sure that I won’t butt in, I can promise you——”

“Oh, but you needn’t feel——” Jane was beginning, but Nettie had no mind to let her finish.

“I understand, Jeannette, dearie!” she hurried on. “But it works both ways,—don’t you see? ’Tisn’t my affair what you do, and—if I should want to do anything you didn’t quite understand—why, you would return the compliment,—see?”

It was Miss Llewellyn’s delicate way of suggesting that she “had something on” Jane.

“I think I do,” said little Jane quietly. “We’re not to interfere with each other.” It sounded like a dreary sort of rule of life!

"That's it, honey! No questions asked, to avoid mistakes!" And having mixed two stock gag-lines into one gay aphorism, Nettie laughed relievedly. She was glad to have that brief word of explanation with Jane well over; she realized now that she had almost dreaded it.

Jane kept her face turned away as she said lightly:

"Oh, don't worry! I won't butt in. Come on, —let's get to bed. Lyter's called a general rehearsal at nine!—Oh, you want the beer, don't you? I'll telephone again—There's the knock! Now, drink it, and for goodness' sake, turn in!"

Jane went to sleep almost immediately, but it was not a peaceful sleep. She was harried by dreams,—restless, uncomfortable dreams, from which she woke often, hot and trembling from nervousness. Once her smothered gasp woke Nettie, who started up crying:

"Jeannette! What's the matter?"

"Nothing!" whispered Jane, sinking back upon her pillow. "I only dreamed I was—in danger!"

In her sleep she had once more imagined herself held fast in Tom Brainerd's arms, just as she had been in the thick dark of the tunnel. Again she had felt his face close to hers, his lips almost

touching her lips. In reality he had drawn away, but in her dream he had kissed her. . . . It was the dream kiss that had awakened her.

For a time she lay awake, trembling, but by morning she had forgotten it. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

NETTIE LLEWELLYN'S CODE—AND ANOTHER

. . . Good energy and bad; power of mind with physical health; the ecstasies of devotion with the exasperation of debauchery. . . . This energy usually carries a trace of ferocity. . . . As there is a use in medicine for poisons, so the world cannot move without rogues. . . . Fierce and unscrupulous, they are usually frank and direct, and above falsehood.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

It was five o'clock just a fortnight later, and Nettie and Jane had been installed in their minute three-room flat for a little over a week. Tom had found them quarters in the region that overlooks the great gulf which is Chinatown. It was on one of those stupendous paved hills, incredible at first to an Easterner; and from the girls' rooms the city and the sea spread out like a dream.

Perched there looking out and down, Jane never ceased thinking of earthquakes, though the thought brought her no sense of actual fear. What a stronghold of elemental forces it was! How close to the violent primal rages of nature! The very formation of the town was volcanic, terrific.

The smooth pavements seemed but freshly laid like a veneer over torrents of lava, chaotic masses of the world in the making. When Jane looked from the window at dusk and saw the mists piling up, white puff on grey puff, blue puff on purple, as they rolled in from the Pacific, she always had in mind the fantastic simile of a smoking crater. But she adored every bit of it. The fact of its being strange and in a sense sublimely ominous did not terrify her: it thrilled her. She was glad that they had rooms where they could taste to the full the curious, exciting, fateful loveliness of this city which is the eternal bride of the splendid and cruel god of earth.

San Francisco clings to the earth that has shattered her with passion and with fury. Her love is fierce and enduring; she cannot be killed nor alienated. Again and again has the earth crushed her, then raised her once more; and once more she smiles, a queen, and proud among all other cities, though so many times a martyr to the wild love of the arms wherein she lies.

When Nettie first saw the flat she objected petulantly and strenuously.

"It isn't so very cheap," she complained, "and it isn't fashionable, and it isn't convenient!"

"Oh, but Nettie," protested Jane rapturously, "look at that ocean of buildings, and the park place—did you call it the Presidio?—It's made of ten thousand kinds of green! And I used to think people were joking when they said the Pacific was a different colour from other water! California is just impossible; you know that it can't be and that you'll wake up in a minute. I expect to find blue roses here and the dodo, before I go East!"

Tom nodded.

"I thought you'd like the flat," he said. And though Nettie pouted, she gave in.

The first week had been too full of rehearsals for them to get much comfort out of their temporary home. The rooms were rented furnished of course, but there were many little touches they longed to add. They had hardly had time, however, to hang a fresh curtain or to cook their hasty meals until the last day or two. But now a sort of lull had come, through the bad cold which Lyter had caught and which kept him indoors. They were opening on Monday, and this was Saturday. On Sunday, of course, they would have the inevitable all-day dress rehearsal; tonight they were as free as "real people," as Jane said.

"Gee, but it feels good not to have to do anything!" sighed Nettie, luxuriously stretching herself and reaching for a cigarette. "Come away from that window, Jeannette;—shut it first, though. These coast fogs give me the horrors! No wonder poor old Lyter got sick!"

Jane closed the window reluctantly, but she did not leave it.

"I like them," she said.

"The fogs? Lord, you'd like anything! Why should you like a change of temperature every day that sends you rooting for your furs to wear over the summer muslin you put on in the morning? The changes you have to take in this rotten climate beat any Protean vaudeville sketch I ever saw staged! The Casino show girls who have twenty changes an evening have nothing on people in 'Frisco!"

"I think it's the changes I like," declared Jane. "Not the changes of clothes. I haven't enough to change my things every time the day changes its temperature!" She laughed. "But it's fun to wake up to lovely fresh winds and misty sunlight, and then walk out at noon into a regular blaze of heat, scorching and brilliant and perfectly still, and then in the afternoon to see the big cold grey

fog pouring in from the sea as though it were September up North!"

"Geel!" said Nettie. "Well, you're easy pleased. You can have it!"

She smoked in silence for a minute or two. Every now and then she glanced uneasily at Jane's unconscious back as though there were some subject which she wished to broach, but about which she felt a bit doubtful.

She was looking particularly well that evening. Her pale yellow hair was carefully dressed, her rouge put on with a discreet and dainty touch. She wore an old stage frock, which, while startling in design and cheap in material, was of a warm violet shade that was eminently becoming. Her really splendid neck and arms were bare and she wore her best slippers,—the ones with the enormous gilt buckles. Any one knowing her would have seen that she was dressed for other eyes than Jane's.

"Jeannette," she burst out abruptly, as she lighted a fresh cigarette, "Tom Brainerd's coming to dinner tonight."

She wondered rather anxiously whether Jane would remember that "code" about not interfering. It would be just like the tiresome little thing

to hang around and spoil everything,—no, it wouldn't either! She knew suddenly that it wouldn't be a particle like her. When had Jane ever been known to be tactless?

"Oh, Nettie," she exclaimed, much perturbed, "there isn't a thing to eat in the house, except the left-over tamales!"

Nettie smiled triumphantly.

"Nay, nay, my child! What do you think I went out for this afternoon? Not a constitutional, you may bet your sweet little life! I went to market!"

"Nettie!" Jane prepared to scold. "If you've been buying lobsters and champagne again——"

"Not quite as bad as that. I bought a steak,—a perfectly beautiful steak; that's always safe with a man. And a can of mushrooms. And Roquefort cheese for a salad. And lots and lots of beer! The case ought to be here any minute. There!"

"It sounds superb," said Jane. "But you must have spent everything we expect to make for the next year! I'd better go and make the Roquefort dressing right away."

"Do, darling! You're so much better at it than I. Though I dare say I'll be able to do the steak all right."

She said this both tentatively and defiantly,—a curious mixture,—and waited breathlessly for its effect. Surely Jane would get the hint!

Jane did.

She felt again that little twist about her heart,—they were becoming more familiar, those odd sensations. She knew they all belonged obscurely to growing up. . . . In just a second her beautiful sense and tact sprang into life clearly and fully, and she said, smiling and with no undercurrent of bitterness:

“It’s a lucky sort of chance anyway! I’m dining out myself tonight!”

She spoke so naturally and quickly that Nettie suspected nothing. A certain awkwardness fell from the older girl immediately, and she cried in gay relief:

“Gee! you’re a good little running partner! Never catch you asleep at the switch! Who are you going out with,—Otho?”

Jane did not answer for a moment; then she said mockingly but sweetly:

“Don’t you wish you knew?”

Nettie laughed too, as she patted down the patch of black court-plaster which had become loose upon her round and attractive chin.

"Of course it's Otho!" she said confidently. "Jeannette, you don't take proper care of that boy!"

Jane stood quite still with her back turned to her friend. After a barely perceptible pause, she asked, with sincere anxiety:

"How do you mean,—proper care?"

Nettie laughed audaciously.

"Perhaps I should have said '*improper* care,' since you're not married yet!"

Jane turned and looked at her, puzzled.

"But," she said, "it's just the same as if I were."

"Oh," laughed Nettie, "I under"—and then stopped abruptly, realizing all at once that she did not in the least understand, and probably never would.

There was a knock at the door.

"That's the beer!" exclaimed Nettie. "Thank the Lord it came early! Run and see about it, Jeannette. How I wish we had a dumb-waiter in this outlandish dump! Will you have time to put a few bottles on ice, angel, before you dress?"

The knock came again, impatiently.

"I think so," said Jane dryly, "as I'm not going to dress tonight."

"You'd better!" warned Nettie the experienced.

Jane

"You have to doll up for men, even the young ones that don't know much. Of course, it's different after you're married."

"I should think you'd have to doll up more then," said Jane on her way to the door, "so as to give him a pleasant surprise, you know."

It was in voicing this sentiment that she opened the door, to see Tom Brainerd standing with a faint smile on his lips.

"Oh, come in!" faltered Jane. "I—we thought you were the beer!"

The beer did arrive at that moment, and Jane gladly made her escape to the kitchen to put bottles in the ice box, light the gas oven, cut the bread, wash the lettuce, and make salad dressing before eliminating herself from the feast. Nettie was as helpless as a baby when it came to cooking, and Jane laughed to herself as she cogitated on the probable condition of the steak when it would reach the table.

"It's a toss up whether it's served raw or burned up altogether!" she chuckled, but there was no malice in her amusement. She honestly wished that she could stay and cook the dinner without appearing at it in person. That, however, was out of the question. She could only complete

the preparations as far as she could, leaving everything ready for Nettie, much as a kindergarten teacher leaves blocks and coloured worsteds for her pupil to manipulate. Then she came out, smiling cheerily.

"I shall have to hurry," she explained, "so I shan't sit down, thanks."

For Tom had risen as she came into the room, with the awkwardness that always accompanied his acts of courtesy. It was not a physical un-gainliness,—he was far too well made a man ever to be clumsy in his movements,—it was rather an obvious consciousness of being out of key with the refinements and conventions of life. It seemed a deliberate and almost defiant attitude of mind, as though he resented yielding to superficial social obligations, and did so scornfully, against his will.

He was a striking figure nevertheless, notably handsome, and though scarcely above medium height, decidedly a man made to command men and situations. Jane frankly approved of his looks. She loved everything that was fitting, and beautiful, and well-done. Tom's roughly fine face and easy carriage always gave her a sense of pleasure, though in a different way from Otho's boyish but undeniable beauty. In Brainerd her

swift perceptions sensed something big and worthy of admiration, yet something too which always made her shrink. It seemed to her that it was cruelty which her sensitiveness felt in him, though he had never shown cruelty when he had been with her.

He still stood looking at her, and she walked on quickly into the bedroom and shut the door.

"She's going out to dinner," said Nettie a trifle uncomfortably. .

Tom turned sharply.

"Going out! You told her I was coming,—I mean, when you asked me?"

"Yes," lied Nettie. Then she burst out impetuously: "No, I didn't! I'm tired of only seeing you with other people around. I didn't say anything about it until tonight. I want you all to myself just once in a while. Tom, aren't you the least bit glad we're going to have a little dinner all alone,—just like old times?"

She looked altogether charming as she leaned back in her chair, her dark, pleading, glowing eyes lifted to his with a hundred meanings in their depths not hard for a man like Tom Brainerd to read. But, thinking of little Jane, he hardened his heart.

"Did you give her a hint to make herself scarce?" he demanded uncompromisingly.

Nettie did not answer.

"*Did* you?"

"N-not exactly," she said uncertainly.

"I believe you did," said Tom, regarding her keenly. "It would be so damned like you!"

"Well, I didn't, so there!" flared Nettie. "But when we agreed to live together, I—I gave her to understand that we weren't to interfere with—with each others'—affairs."

"You did! You"—He checked himself. "And what did she say?"

"She said something about it's being a sort of 'code'"—

"Well," said Tom grimly, picking up his hat, "she'll find that there's more than one code in the world. Here's mine, for instance: while that child lives with you I'll have no parties alone with you in this flat, so help me heaven! It's an insult to her."

"But Tom,—in the old days——"

"Can't you understand that it's what happened in the old days that makes the insult?"

There were tears of rage in Nettie's eyes.

"I suppose," she gasped spitefully, "that you'd rather it was I who had the dinner engagement!"

"It isn't a question of what I'd prefer," said Tom, who was not wont to call spades dessert spoons. "Can't you see, Nettie, that everything of that sort is off? I wouldn't have even the thought of it come near Jane."

"I bet you'd stay here with *her* alone though, and glad of the chance!"

"You may bet I would not! No pairing off in these diggings, my girl. Either I see you two together, or I don't see you at all. Get me?"

"I ought to. You're plain enough!"

"That's good! Now go and fetch Jane in, and let's have dinner."

"You're a brute, Tom!" said the girl, choking. While her predatory temperament would not let her leave other men alone, she bitterly hated to see Tom go out of her life; and he was going very fast. She had loved him violently, in her way.

"Sure I am," said Tom; and added somewhat coarsely, but not ill-naturedly, "you'd never have looked at me twice if I hadn't been."

Nettie coloured under the rouge.

"You're not a brute to her," she said in a low voice.

"It's because I'm such a brute that I know how to protect her," said Brainerd. "Besides"—he

drew a short hard breath,—“I might show the brute toward her yet; you never can tell!”

“Why should you?”

“I don't know. It hasn't been necessary yet.”

Jane came out of the bedroom wearing her hat and travelling duster. Tom turned to meet her.

“I hope you're going to change your mind, and break that engagement of yours,” he said. “I'd quite looked forward to dining with you girls, but I'm afraid I shan't be able to stay unless you do.”

Jane, in her utter bewilderment, looked at Nettie, and the older girl laughed angrily:

“Mr. Brainerd has had a sudden attack of propriety,” she said biting her lips. “You wouldn't think it of him, would you? He wants to be chaperoned! Yes,” in answer to Jane's mute and wary question, “you'd better break your engagement,—if dear Otho won't be too annoyed!” she added with a spiteful glance at Tom.

“Lendrick is dining with Dixon tonight,” he remarked quietly. “Charlie is coaching him in the new part, and he's to understudy the lead as well.” His eyes met Jane's squarely. “Nettie can't cook anyway!” he went on, rather lightly for him. “Aren't you going to stay and help out?”

"Yes," said Jane meekly, and went to take off her hat and coat.

"Tom Brainerd, I'm through with you for ever!" murmured Nettie furiously.

Tom laughed.

"As the old folks say,—'God break hard fortune!'" he rejoined. "If your dinner's good, Net, maybe it will help to heal my broken heart!"

CHAPTER XVII

CONTRASTS AND COMBINATIONS

. . . She sees the world
Can recognize its given things and facts,
The fight of giants or the feast of gods,

Chases and battles, the whole earth's display,
Landscape and sea-piece, down to flowers and fruit—
And who shall question that she knows them all. . .

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE little living-room in which Jane and Nettie and Tom ate their dinner that night was by no means the study in contradictions which the girls' antipodal tendencies should have made it. Indeed Tom was amazed and rather nonplussed by the harmony of it. Nothing jarred, nor was in undue prominence, yet it was full of colour, without monotony of tone or tint. Slowly it came to him that it was Jane's touch which had kept the whole beautiful and gay without being garish and vulgar.

He was not a man of conscious good taste, but he had a sort of instinct for beauty, and he despised cheap and tawdry effects. Vulgarities of

appearance was worse to him than vulgarity of actions. He might wallow at times with the rest of the swine, but he had a keen appreciation of the really fine and exquisite things of the world. Bad colour combinations hurt his eyes without his knowing why. The presence of unlimited cluttering trash annoyed his businesslike and masculine mind. He liked those clean classic spaces which are always lovely and always neat. And he liked colour—colour which did not go crazy and swear at itself.

Everything in the room was harmonized, eased into place as it were, by a mind and heart and hand so full of real personality that they had no need to insist upon evidences thereof.

Jane did not care whether or not she “expressed herself” in her surroundings; she tried to make those surroundings as attractive as, given them and their ingredients, was humanly possible.

Brainerd looked at her as she sat at the small round table, or flitted in and out of the kitchen. With a big apron tied on over her gown, her little face flushed from cooking and her red hair literally on end, she was more elfin, more tantalizing than ever. Nettie Llewellyn saw his expression, and her heart grew still more bitter.

Contrasts and Combinations 231

But she was not really a bad sort, and she had now and then a spark of pride. She would not spoil the evening by her own ill-humour; above all, she would not give Tom Brainerd the satisfaction, as she expressed it to herself, of knowing how much he had hurt her. She chattered volubly enough about their coming "season" and various theatrical matters. Jane's dinner was excellent, so it was not as trying as it might have been.

Tom Brainerd could be really interesting when he took the trouble, which was seldom. He was usually at his best with men he knew well, and to them would tell innumerable stories, crisp and colourful—some of them in fact a bit too colourful,—and deliver such views of life and men and women and morality as had crystalized in his keen brain during his short but crowded existence. Men liked Brainerd for his force, his unquestionable manliness, his pluck and clear sense. He was "a good fellow," one you could tie up to; and, with all his business shrewdness and avowed intention to get rich, he was the most generous of mortals when any one really needed generosity. He had the strong man's impatience with weakness in those of his own sex, whether of character or of body, yet he had helped more than one weakling.

It is true that he had not helped particularly kindly nor graciously, but the money, advice, or whatever was required, had been forthcoming just the same.

With women he rarely made the slightest mental effort. His view of the sex was not a high one, and he looked on their favour as too easily won to deserve any real exertion. His experience had brought him so much unearned love that he would have laughed at the suggestion that any woman's affections were worth actually working for. Fighting—that was a different matter. He knew that there were women who liked to be fought for, and since fighting was a congenial enough amusement, he had no objection to knocking a man down now and then the more quickly to arouse the feminine interest which, after all, he liked, even while he scorned it.

Tonight, however, he really talked,—talked more and talked better than Nettie Llewellyn had ever heard him in all the period of their intimacy. He found quite a number of stories in his storehouse that would bear inspection by the eyes of propriety, and he told them well, in short slangy phrases full of suggestions to any one with an imagination. His life had already led him into queer

places, and wherever he had gone he had seen more than most persons would have seen.

What appealed to Jane most was the human, vivid interest he took in human, vivid things. It was evident to her that, like herself, he cared strongly for *people*, just the everyday, mortal creatures, and found the most ordinary of them fascinating. He liked the sordid, ugly world and found it dramatic and exciting. He had discovered adventure on freight trains and omnibuses, in shoe-shops and cheap restaurants, and at the most obscure way stations. In the least promising places of the world had he come upon his stories, and his telling of them was a delight to her because it was a sort of justification of her own incurable habit of finding both drama and comedy in the commonplaces of the earth. As they sat over the empty dishes, Tom talking and smoking and the two girls listening in their different moods, a quick, nervous knock interrupted them.

It was Otho, looking very well and very handsome, and carrying his violin case.

The meeting of the two men always gave Jane a throb of anxiety. Womanlike, she never could quite forget that fateful evening outside the sleeping-car at Pico, when she had believed Brainerd

was going to strike Otho. But men do not, as a rule, harbour old scores the way women do, and these two shook hands with no apparent memory of any clouding grudge.

"Am I interrupting?" Otho asked, happily confident that he wasn't. "Dixon had one of his nervous fits tonight,—white as a ghost and shaky,—and didn't want to work. So I came on here. Brought my fiddle, you see! If I try to play at our joint some tramp who's sleeping off a bat or something raises heaven about it!"

"Is Mr. Dixon going to be too sick to open on Monday?" asked Jane as Otho sat down at the table, and took the cigarette which Nettie had coquettishly lighted for him.

Otho laughed.

"No such luck!" he said. "No, I didn't mean that, Jane,—don't look so horrified! I like Dixon, and I know I'd be rotten in his part anyway, even if I got a chance to play it. Dixon's only nervous. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he went out himself later on. He just doesn't want the bother of coaching me, and I don't blame him!"

"Go on with the story, Mr. Brainerd," urged Jane, who had been too interested in Tom's reminiscences to give them up without a protest.

Contrasts and Combinations 235

"Then I did interrupt!" said Otho. "What was the yarn, Brainerd?"

He had slipped into the easy-going theatrical manner with the ease of a highly impressionable nature; with Tom he was always particularly airy and casual. It was a bit of boyish bravado which puzzled Jane, but which Tom himself perfectly understood and did not especially resent.

"It wasn't a regular yarn," he said rather unwillingly, for his mood was broken. "It was just an odd sort of happening I ran across a couple of years ago. I suppose you'd call it a kind of a problem, for the point of the thing was—what the fellow really ought to have done."

"Oh,—problems!" scoffed Nettie Llewellyn. "What we want to know is: did anything *happen*?"

"Lots of things happened," answered Tom. "But I guess you'll be just as glad that they aren't all in the story! He was an animal trainer, a big, husky chap, and he was crazy blind in love with a little wisp of a girl who did an act with five performing dogs."

"Mercy!" said Nettie Llewellyn. "Was this a circus?"

Tom nodded.

"A mighty bum one!" he said. I did some press

work for the show, and I got to pal up with—well, we'll call him Joe; it's as good a name as any other. He was a good sort when he wasn't trailing 'round after Dolly. Then he was just plain nutty.

"One day a new performer joined us, a lion-taming fellow with a pair of big Nubian devils that never seemed more than half tamed, though he managed them magnificently. He was a small chap, thin and ratty looking, and he couldn't look you in the face, but he seemed to have those lions where he wanted them. They'd obey him as though he were five times their size. They hated him, too; snarled and roared at him, and sometimes one or the other of them would strike out and rip up his sleeve or his trunks or something. And then he'd just laugh, and thrash the brute with an iron rod he had till it would cringe and crawl and do what he told it to. He was some devil himself."

"He sounds pretty vile!" declared Otho, who was invariably revolted by physical cruelty in any manifestation.

Jane shuddered, but she leaned forward, breathless and expectant.

"And of course the performing-dog girl fell in

love with him," remarked Nettie with an unforeseen inspiration.

Tom raised his heavy black brows in surprise.

"That's right," he said. "How did you guess, Net?"

"Well," said Nettie wisely, "you said the other man—Joe—was in love with her; so of course she'd go stalking some one else. That's nature!"

Tom laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe you're right! Anyhow, she did fall in love with him; and what's more, she married him within the first month. They both stayed on with the show, and so did Joe.

"Joe was pretty well knocked up by the whole thing. But he wouldn't leave, though everyone expected him to. First he said it was because he wasn't going to quit cold like that just because he had lost out. But later on he admitted to me that he stayed because he was still fond of Dolly, and was afraid to leave her with Anton without a protector somewhere around. You may guess from that what sort of a husband he thought Anton was going to make!

"Anton was a sure-enough devil before he married, but he was a worse one after! He always enjoyed doing downright rotten cruel things, and

the taste grew on him. He got to be a perfect fiend with the lions, and tormented them until I swear I'd have been pleased to see them eat him alive! And he abused his wife's performing dogs until they were no good for the show business. I've seen him——"

"See here!" broke in Otho. "What's the earthly good in making us sick?"

"That's right!" Tom glanced at Jane, and saw that her cheeks were whiter than usual. "Well, it went on like that for quite a bit. Whenever I'd speak of it to Joe, he'd only say in a queer sort of voice, 'Wait a while! Just wait a while!'

"And then Anton took to ill-treating his wife as well as the animals."

"But see here!" Otho interrupted again, speaking tumultuously. "What were you fellows doing that you didn't stop all this? You know how to fight, and I expect the chap Joe did too. You weren't like me; you weren't the sort that would get licked! How was it that you let it go on?" he frowned and flushed. "I apologize for cutting in like that," he muttered, "but brutality always makes me hot!"

Jane's heart went out to him.

"I guess some one ought to have interfered," Tom acknowledged. "I've wondered since whether I could have done anything, but I'm inclined to think it turned out best as it was. The girl was his wife you see, and she stood for it. But it was a pretty bad life for her. And still Joe would keep saying, 'Just wait a little while longer!' That was all.

"And she got whiter and thinner all the time. And from the way friend Anton acted any one would have said he was half insane. But he was one great lion trainer just the same, and he gave crackerjack performances.

"I don't know whether any of you people know anything at all about the business of training wild beasts. As a stunt in the straight-and-narrow it has the parson lay beaten to a standstill. One of the first important points about an animal man is that he can't drink,—can't drink anything at all. If he isn't dead, cold, bed-rock sober, the beasts know it somehow, and then it's good-night animal man! Anton never touched a drop,—till one night Joe asked him to go out with him."

Tom stopped long enough to select and light a cigarette. Something made them all wait spell-bound for the next words. So strong was the man's

personality and his power of projecting his own impression of the past that they were all acutely aware of an impending breath of tragedy.

"Anton wouldn't go at first," resumed Tom, "but Joe could be as smooth as oil when he liked, and he got round him. Dolly had turned up at the afternoon performance with a black bruise and her cheek only half covered up by the grease-paint, and eyes that looked as though she had been crying for a week. Whenever she looked like that Joe'd get extra sweet and amiable and chummy with Anton. It would make your blood run cold to watch it. Any one could see that somebody was riding for a fall, but it was open betting who it'd be.

"Joe kept Anton out with him until just before his act was called. We were marking time for him and filling in with clown stunts and that sort of thing, when they came in. Our Old Man was in such a hurry to get the trainer into the big lion cage that he never noticed anything, and neither did I. But when I saw Joe's face, white as a piece of paper, and queer about the eyes, I knew something was up. His nose looked pinched, too. Ever noticed that look about a man's nose when he's just at the breaking point? I've seen just the

Contrasts and Combinations 241

ghost of it in Charlie sometimes when he was all in and afraid he wouldn't get through the performance without going to pieces.

"I saw Anton walk into the cage, in his black tights, carrying that long iron rod of his, and he put out his hand to catch at the bars of the door as it closed behind him. I saw he was trying to steady himself, and I was on. Joe had gotten him drunk, and he was going to face the lions in that state.

"I was just wondering what I'd better do when Joe put his hand on my shoulder. He was smiling in a funny, crooked way, and he looked crazy enough for Bellevue.

"Let me go!" I said. "I've got to speak to the boss!"—"Better wait and see the fun!" said he with a mad sort of chuckle.

"And just then—it happened."

Tom stopped short with another shrug.

"Better not go into that," he said. "I don't believe you'd like to hear a description of it. I remember the first thing I thought of was perfectly silly,—it was that Anton ought to have had his black get-up trimmed with red in the first place, it made such a good combination."

"So the lions killed him?" said Nettie.

"They certainly did. I never saw anything more completely done."

There was a short silence. Imaginative Jane, horror-stricken, could see painted upon the smoke-dulled air of the little room an outline of the black figure with its ghastly "trimming" of red, and the tawny shapes of the "two Nubian devils" crouching over it. She put the too-vivid picture from her, and whispered:

"You said there was a problem."

"There is. Was Joe justified in doing what he did? That's the problem."

They looked at him in astonishment.

"Good God, Brainerd!" exclaimed Otho. "You can't mean to imply that there could be any question about that! Of course he couldn't be justified in a monstrous thing like that! The man was a criminal!"

"You just called the turn on him yourself," said Nettie. "You said he was out of his head."

Tom looked at Jane.

"Well?" he wanted to know. "What do you think?"

She shook her head.

"Of course the man had to die," she declared with surprising conviction. "But he would have

died anyway. Things work out somehow. And because he was wicked didn't excuse the other man from being wicked as well."

"It wasn't a question of wickedness in Joe's mind," said Tom. "He didn't care a blow whether he was wicked or not. What he cared about was Dolly. She was unhappy, and the only way to save her was to sacrifice the man. There it is."

"But," said Jane in her quaint, old-in-wisdom way, "he didn't have to *enjoy* sacrificing him. That was *his* wicked part."

Tom sat silent for a long minute, staring at the end of his cigarette, which had gone out.

"Well," he said at last, "I might just as well come down to brass tacks and say that I'd have done the same thing in his place. There is no room in the world for men like him. The unfit have to be sacrificed to the fit, and if the only way it can be done is by brutality, why,—so much the worse for the one who has to go to the wall! It's a law, and you can't get away from it. It's got to be. If I see any one who ought to be crushed"—there was a fierce gleam in his dark eyes, a gleam quickly veiled,—"I propose to crush him."

Nettie shivered.

“For the love of heaven,” she exclaimed, “let’s talk about something nice and cheery like the Morgue!”

CHAPTER XVIII

OTHO'S MAGIC

. . . . There arose
A noise of harmony, pulses and throes
Of gladness in the air. . . .

Enchantment

Grew drunken, and would have its head and bent.
Delicious sympathies, like airy flowers,
Budded, and swelled, and, full-blown, shed full showers
Of light, soft, unseen leaves of sounds divine.

JOHN KEATS.

OTHO was full of the music which he was writing. He had had one of his inspirational, creative moods during the past week, and he enthusiastically proclaimed what apparently he just as enthusiastically believed, that he had the nucleus of a first-rate light opera.

"I only want the words!" he declared. "I can't write them, but I know the sort of thing I want,—something dainty, and—and feathery somehow, and different! I have half a dozen tunes,—real ones, not trash, and I can *feel* the lyrics that

ought to go with them, even if I can't put them into words!"

Tom laughed, blowing smoke-rings.

"The libretto's half the battle," he reminded him. "I've known one or two cases where a musical show would have died in a night without some good dialogue and catch-lines. But if you've really got the goods,—the musical stuff,—tell you what we'll do. I know a lot of musical guys. When we get to Broadway, if we ever do, I'll take you to some Johnny that knows the difference between rag-time and grand opera, and you can play him your masterpieces. We'll see where you get off! Eh?"

Otho's face brightened.

"That's awfully good of you, Brainerd!" he cried impulsively; then stiffened in a boyish, transparent way. "I—I don't know that I care to put myself under obligations—" he said, more formally.

Tom raised his eyebrows with an indifferent smile.

"Have it your own way," he said with neither rancour nor bitterness.

Otho seemed to come to a sudden, irresistible resolution.

"Wait a moment," he said quietly; none of them had ever seen him show so much genuine

dignity. There was nothing of youthful, vain-glorious boasting in the simple air of confidence with which he took his violin from its case and tried a string attentively. "Let me play you one or two of the airs."

Now a violin sustained and upheld by the reliable arms of an accompanying piano is one thing; the violin swinging in intoxicated unity with the other instruments of an orchestra is another; the violin singing alone, without companions, is something utterly different once more. And this lonely violin may be a weak and characterless failure, or one of the most wonderful things in the world. It is seldom mediocre. Either it bores and jars past toleration, or it lays a spell upon all who listen to its inspired and solitary voice. It is the lark or nightingale of the soul, voicing something too fine and fragile to be shared with other vehicles.

Otho had never played alone for them before. Of course Jane had heard him often enough in the woods at home, but she had never heard him do anything like this. Just how it had come about Otho himself could not have told. He was not conscious of any artistic growth achieved in the months of the tour. But it was there. He played

with a surety and an ease that made him all at once seem a very different person from the weak and often petulant boy to whom they were indulgently accustomed.

Possibly some of the uncongenial work which he had executed so extraordinarily badly had helped in a measure to train him. But there was something in his playing that was unquestionably more than the result of practice.

And his melodies! Where had he found them? They fell lightly, entrancingly upon the ear, sweetly inevitable, yet always fresh and surprising. At times a perverse twist in a musical phrase would bring an instinctively sympathetic smile to the young composer's lips, and he would glance about, as who should say: "There! Have I not pleased you with that? Did you think I was going to end it in that way?"

Jane's heart thrilled with delight. It was Otho's hour; he had never shown to such high advantage. The idealism of his music was like an uplifting hand. It came upon the grim and ugly mood induced by Tom Brainerd's story, with an exquisite shock of contrast. Before the subtle sorcery of his violin and his really charming music, Tom, with his relentless and sometimes brutal

viewpoint, his merciless philosophy of life, his domineering individuality and rough-hewn person, seemed a thing of coarser and duller make, a creature of a lower world. . . .

"Well," said Otho, still quietly, but with a joyous glow in his face, "how do you like my tunes?"

"They're ducks of tunes!" declared Nettie, rather inappropriately but fervently. "They make you want to laugh and sing and dance."

"It was lovely, Otho!" breathed Jane. "Mr. Brainerd,—tell Otho that *you* think it is good, too!"

She had a defiant longing to make Tom admit Otho's genius for once.

Tom had been sitting motionless with his head bent. Once or twice he had glanced up in an odd, puzzled fashion, as though he saw the young musician for the first time. Now he said with a slight effort:

"It's good stuff, Lendrick,—at least it strikes me that way. You'll want some one to help you orchestrate it and put it in shape I suppose. But—the tunes are all right."

"All right? I knew it!" laughed Otho.

But with the putting away of his violin, his brief mantle of magic and authority fell from him once

again. The glow faded, and he was only Otho, without the glamour and the dream.

"See here," he said, with a sudden shifting of mood, "have you girls seen the town properly yet?"

"We've been about a little," Nettie said, "but not with any one."

"And not at night!" put in Jane eagerly. "And everything is so much more thrilling at night! I always think," she went on naively, "that we ought always to meet people for the first time at night. We're all so much more interesting then; and anyway you feel at night that 'most *anything* might happen, and you wouldn't care a bit!"

"How about it, Brainerd?" suggested Otho, with that newly acquired swagger of his. Shall we give them a 'personally conducted' through Chinatown?"

And so they all went to see what Chinatown was like at night. Nettie, still smarting haughtily from her rebuff at Tom's hands, dashed on ahead with Otho, laughing and talking rather hysterically. Jane stayed behind a minute or two to clear the dinner-table and lower the lights, while Tom waited for her at the door, hat in hand and soberly patient. When she came out quietly, with her shabby old duster and the old-fashioned but becoming little

straw hat she usually wore, he had difficulty in keeping all that he felt out of his eyes. She was, he thought, as necessary a part of his life as his own blood, leaping at sight of her, as the air that kept him alive, as the inner thoughts and ambitions of which he so seldom talked.

"You've made a regular little home there," he said, as they went down the five long flights of stairs.

"Think so?" Jane had a wistful look. "It's funny! I like making homes, and yet I have an idea I shall never have any one home very long. Do you suppose that's why I get so much comfort out of it?"

"I don't quite see—" Tom began, mystified.

"I mean," Jane hurried on, "people who can live in one place for always can take their time making it homelike. But if you're going to move on the very next minute you have to be most awfully quick!"

"Do you—" Tom's voice was a bit husky,—"do you think you'd like being in one—home—for always?—a home that was quite your own, with no question of moving on?"

"I don't know," answered Jane honestly. "Sometimes it seems as though it would be the

loveliest thing in all the world, the most heavenly thing that could possibly happen to any one. You see, the Bible gives you the idea that Heaven is most beautifully domestic."

Tom stared; he was not very familiar with the Scriptures, but he did not recall celestial domesticity among the divine promises that he had chanced to hear.

"You remember, of course," Jane said, seeing his expression, "it's the part about the 'many mansions' and 'my Father's house.' I always thought 'preparing a place for you' sounded so *home-y*, just as though the angels were going to house-clean, and get everything ready for you to live there cosily for ever and ever!" Jane laughed with pleasure at the idea. Then she added more slowly: "And yet—one wonders!"

"What about?" demanded Tom. "Heaven, or—home?"

"Home. There are so many places in the world, and every single one is more interesting than all the others! And of course one wants to see them all. Isn't it a pity that one can't have a million perfectly good homes of one's own,—one in every place one has liked?"

"*You* could," said Tom, with some mental as-

tonishment at his own words; he had always believed himself constitutionally averse to paying women any sort of compliments. "I think wherever you are you will make a home, Jane!"

That was all he said then, but he had made up his mind that he would say a good deal more before they went back that night. He was going to ask Jane in so many words to be his wife.

Jane, characteristically, had put out of her mind the sinister impression made by the tale of the lion trainer, and Tom's attitude regarding it. She refused to cherish ugly memories, and the elimination of them came as easily to her as the elimination of impurities by the sun. With her invariable sensitiveness to the moods of her companions, she felt something untowardly tense in the atmosphere, and had the good sense and good feeling not to try to forcibly dispel it, as many ever-tactful persons might have tried to do. From those who try to "brighten us up," and hoist us out of our grouches with irrelevant chatter, good Lord deliver us! Jane talked very little as they walked along the dusky, lamplit street to the top of the hill where they were to take the car.

She had never gone down into Chinatown before, and looked forward to the novel experience with

her usual eagerness. The car hung poised on the edge of the sharply inclined track, like a bird on a peak. It was already full, save for a small space on one of the long parallel seats that took up about half the car. They sat down there, though Tom said: "You'd have been more comfortable in one of the regular cross-car seats, but you don't want to wait for the next, do you? It's only a short run anyway."

She looked out through the front windows, and saw the sea of lights that was San Francisco. But it seemed a great distance below, and stretched an incredible way, like a real ocean seen from a dizzy cliff. Jane's heart beat faster, though not from fear nor apprehension. If she had ever been in a scenic railway she might have recognized this sensation, this breath-holding pause before plunging into an abyss. As it was, she could not be expected to understand her own feelings. She sat bolt upright, her green eyes very dark and bright.

"The others must have taken the car ahead," said Tom carelessly. He was sitting by her side,—the side nearest the forward end of the car.

They began to move; not quickly,—there was no exhilarating plunge downward,—only a slow,

grinding drop, inch by inch, suspended over an unknown immensity.

Jane had not realized the angle at which they would descend. She found herself pressed by sheer gravity against Tom's heavy shoulder, try as she might to sit upright. As has been said, they were sitting facing the aisle of the car, and they were very near the front. Through those forward windows Jane caught further and wider glimpses of a glimmering, far-reaching city, still a long way below, and an enormously arching sky like a bell the edge of which was a vast distance beneath her. She felt the angle tip even more sharply, and she rested now against her companion, entirely unable to move. With a half hysterical chuckle, she recalled nightmares wherein a weight no greater than this drag of gravitation was enough to arouse a mental panic.

Tom turned his head hastily, to look with concern into her white little face.

"I had forgotten that you were not used to this severe grade!" he exclaimed. "You're not faint, Jane?"

She shook her head as well as she could. Then she laughed weakly.

"We must look most awfully affectionate!" she

faltered, smiling. "But I'm not used to being—tipped up on end—like this! It's dreadfully queer, but—but—it's wonderful!"

"It's new, anyway!" he suggested, though he was a little worried about her. And she laughed again.

Jane's supernormal sensitiveness and her imagination, which made visionary things far more real than ordinary persons' actualities, were bound to colour this simple car-ride into something much more exciting than it really was. Tom saw this now, and only hoped that it had not been too much for her. But, though Jane really felt as though she were hung suspended over eternity, she was also honestly enjoying it! It was a new experience!

In another minute they were down, at that cross street which is the highway into the exotic fragment of Asia known as Chinatown. Jane stood still a moment, holding onto Tom's arm.

"Tell me," she said, speaking quite naturally. "Were we in any danger?"

"Good Lord, no!" he ejaculated. "I've never known of an accident on that road. It's all perfectly adjusted,—cables, clutches, brakes, and all that. Jane,—my dear!—were you frightened?"

"Oh, no," she returned simply. "Not at all.

I thought we were going to go on dropping like that for ever,—through space,—but it wasn't frightening. I was terribly excited and interested,—that's all. It felt something like dying, I guess; and you know dying must be awfully thrilling!"

17

CHAPTER XIX

BY THE LIGHTS OF CHINATOWN

You may train the eagle
To stoop to your fist;
Or you may inveigle
The phoenix of the East;
The lioness, ye may move her
To give o'er her prey;
But you'll ne'er stop a lover:
He will find out his way.

OLD POEM.

"OH, Jane!" cried Nettie Llewellyn, coming out of that famous and gorgeous shop at the corner where the Orient is richly capitalized and exploited for the dazzled eyes and plump purses of white devils. "Such simply divine things! There's a kimono in there that any one would be happy to die in,—all purple cherry blossoms and green birds,—Oh,—Oh! If only I had money! The man said it was just over from China——"

"A kimono? They don't make kimonos in China," Tom informed her rather cruelly. "You're mixed, Nettie! If you'll dig around in the real

By the Lights of Chinatown 259

quarter, you'll find the real stuff. Of course they'll soak you for it. If they didn't want to make money out of Americans they'd have stayed in China."

They started off. Instead of going ahead this time, Nettie and Otho lagged behind, loitering at shop windows, and chattering contentedly with scarcely a look about them.

Later Nettie exhibited to Jane a weird collection consisting of her purchases that evening; green glass bracelets supposed to be Chinese jade; hideous fans manufactured solely for the untutored taste of the Occidental; worst of all, a tiny jar of some dried stuff warranted by the Chinaman who sold it to be "velly nice, heap good," but which, when opened, exhaled so terrific a smell that they were ashamed to put it in their garbage can, but took it out secretly by night and dropped it in the gutter as if by accident!

Tom and Jane did not attempt to keep with these reckless but contented shoppers; but walked on slowly, pausing seldom, both of them very silent.

All her life Jane remembered that strange, picturesque, unreal walk through Chinatown. In all the dreamlike passage of her existence,—and she had come to feel that most things are like dreams,

altogether nightmarish or unbelievably sweet,—no memory ever stood out more fantastically, with so little semblance to verisimilitude as the hour she spent with Tom Brainerd under those innumerable and mysterious lights.

Full of eagerness for novelty as she always was, a trance lay upon her that night. She seemed still to feel the breathless strain of the car-line's down grade which had struck her as so terrific. Perhaps the subtle suspense which her nerves had known during the descent had left its reaction in the shape of this dreamy sense of arrested consciousness. She walked almost mechanically through the narrow, crooked streets, seeing the dim shop-windows and the noiseless, moving, oddly dressed figures as the phantasmagoria of sleep. She looked up at the sky and it was a new, an alien sky, one strange to her eyes and her memories. There was no moon and the stars appeared little and far away. Her glance dropped to a huge flaring lantern of a dull saffron hue just before them. By its sickly light the shadows of the passersby were distorted, grotesque. The indescribable smell of the East,—even in the transplanted East it is indescribable,—was heavy on the night air.

By the Lights of Chinatown 261

The scene was fascinating and bizarre, like scenes sketched by an artist in quaint and exaggerated effects. The sleek, still, black-clothed women with their creamy Sphinx-faces passed with the rapid, gliding, shuffling gait which they had learned through the centuries; they were not ungraceful: they were just—different. There was not a colour about one of them. These, Tom told her in a low tone, were nearly all married women and mothers; they might have been, Jane thought, in mourning for their girlhood.

About them fluttered exquisite butterfly children, gorgeous little boutonnieres come to life, clusters of rainbow tints, tiny blooms from tropical and impossible gardens. Jane thought of humming-birds, of orchid-buds,—but there was nothing quite brilliant enough, exotic enough, dainty enough, to serve as a prototype of these delicious Asiatic babies. And they fitted into the unreality of the hour. For where could such enchanting and strange little creatures be found except in dreams?

“Chillen Blain’ad,—huh!”

This cryptic utterance fell quickly yet mellifluously on their ears.

To Jane’s astonishment, Tom wheeled with an honestly delighted grin and seized in his the hands

of an old, old Chinaman who was in the regulation pyjama-like dark clothes and broad-brimmed hat which formed the conventional street garb of the neighbourhood.

"Glory be!" chortled Tom. "It's Sing Quong Loo, by all that's sinful!"

And Sing Quong Loo smiled well-nigh affectionately.

If Jane had been questioned, she probably would have said that all Chinamen looked alike to her. Yet as she regarded Sing Quong Loo's smooth, wise, old parchment face, she knew quite well that she saw a personality different from all other personalities whether yellow or white.

"You away heap long time, Chillen Blain'ad," said the old man. "You mallied?" He looked with inquisitive, elderly interest at Jane who, needless to say, felt not the slightest resentment.

"Not married yet, Quong!" said Tom smiling. Jane had never seen him so young nor so gay. "This is Miss O'Reilly;—Jane, Sing Quong Loo! He used to be my employer, and the squarest on the Barbary Coast!"

"Plenty pleased, Missy Oli'ly," said Sing Quong Loo politely. "Chillen Blain'ad's fliends heap welcome. Him plenty velly good boy. Hi!

By the Lights of Chinatown 263

What you t'ink, Chillen Blain'ad! You know big joint I lun one time Ba'baly Coast, two mile Seal Lock,—huh? I sell him heap good money! Now I have two, t'lee house Chinatown, all same lich mans. Heap good business! You more better come back chop-chop an' be Quong Loo boy!—Huh?"

Tom shook his head.

"Sorry, Quong, I can't. But I'm heap glad you want me!—He's asking me to go back to work for him," he explained to Jane. "Some compliment, after five years!"

"What is that funny name he calls you?" asked Jane, giving the old Chinaman a friendly smile.

"'Chillen Blain'ad'? Why, 'Chillen' is pigeon English for 'young' or 'little,'—corruption of 'children,' you see, and used as an adjective for convenience! I was young all right, but I reckon you could only have called me little as a sort of joke! Quong, do you still burn joss sticks to your what's-its-name,—T'ien, or Shang Ti,—or whatever you call Heaven?"

"No, no," smiled the old man gently. "It velly close to Quong Loo now; plenty short load" (Quong always said l for r). "All samee one

stleet! Soon Quong Loo he get there light away! Why waste the joss sticks?"

He laughed softly at his grave jest. Then he looked at Jane,—a searching yet veiled gaze that vaguely reminded her of Miss Madden the dwarf.

"You mally," he asserted, pleasantly but firmly. "Missy Oli'ly heap good woman for Chillen Blain'ad!"

Nodding and smiling as though having satisfactorily settled a point of destiny, he moved on and vanished among the sudden shadows of the quarter.

"Funny old guy, but as white as they make 'em, though he *is* yellow!" declared Tom Brainerd.

Though disguised by the night, there was more colour in his dark face than usual. In truth, his old Chinese friend and employer had put into embarrassingly plain words "Chillen Blain'ad's" secret and heartfelt hopes.

Jane did not quite believe that she had really met Sing Quong Loo. His appearance had been so swift and his departure also, his talk had been so odd, his look so quaint, that he had fitted almost too perfectly into the dream fabric of this queer night. . . .

"Jane," said Tom suddenly,—but even his abrupt speech still belonged, at least at first, to the

dream through which she moved. "Jane, are you going to marry me?"

He had never put it into definite words before. Sometimes she had hoped that he had put it out of his mind. It ought to have been a shock to her to find that he had been thinking of it always and steadily. But it was scarcely that. She felt a pang, but it was a gentle one, more pensive than painful.

"I can't marry you, Mr. Brainerd," she said softly.

How strange it all was! Inside one of the houses some one was playing a queer, unfamiliar instrument. The music was uneven, syncopated, unaccountably sad and disturbing. . . . "I can't marry you ever," she repeated.

Some instinct kept her from speaking of Otho just then. After all, although paramount in the matter, Otho was not the sole reason why she would not marry this man.

Tom shook himself as though he shook that off.

"If you don't mind," he said, with neither pain nor pleasure in his deep voice, "I'll tell you, roughly, something about myself."

Jane nodded silently, and he went on in a jerky fashion, as though the narrative had lain buried

too long, and he found it hard to drag it up into the light. The erratic rhythm of the Chinese music somewhere indoors seemed to accompany his words with a singular fitness.

"I was chucked into a reformatory when I was twelve," he said, "and chucked out again at fourteen. I was a promising young thug if you like! I could lick any boy in the gang; and I didn't get in jail only because I was smart from the first and because people were afraid of me with a first-class reason for being afraid. It wasn't healthy for any one to double-cross me, or even to try it on!"

Jane shivered, but not with horror or repulsion. There was something intrinsically and ultimately clean about the man in spite of his frank confession of a rough life; in spite of many things that he might not confess but which her intuition would tell her were there. He was big in character, fundamentally; he was sound, in some obscure fashion that Jane was not experienced enough to weigh or analyze. Out of many black things in him, life's alchemy was going to make pure gold one day. And besides all that, it was not in Jane to be shocked by the truth concerning any living creature. She only trembled now with the sense of

being all at once so terribly near the stormy, cruel heart of life.

A gust of warm air brought a heavy, sickening odour upon its wings, and Tom raised his head to catch it as it passed.

"Dope!" he said. "I used to run errands for a Chink in Mott Street in New York, and he couldn't have lived twelve hours without his pipe. I tried the stuff once or twice myself, but—well, it wasn't good enough, and I cut it out.

"I fought another kid for the job of call-boy in a bum Yiddish music hall on the Bowery when I was sixteen, and got it. I studied the show game from the ground up—literally!" He laughed. "The boss used to knock me down every time he got drunk, and that was every time he had the price. But I stuck.

"Then I went to Chicago, when I was nineteen, with a vaudeville team of wrestlers and acrobats. I'm pretty husky, you know, and was even then; and I always kept fit. Our act bust up, and I joined that sixth-rate circus troupe I was telling you about. I started in as a sort of second assistant to the assistant of the assistant manager; and my job was doing everything that everyone else was too busy or too up-stage—I mean stuck up,

you know,—to do! After a while they let me do some press work for them. I can't write for sour apples, but I had a notion of the things that amused or interested people, and lots of papers ran my stuff in spite of the rotten English. They said I had an original style! You bet your life it was original,—nothing like it ever seen before or since in any publication!" He chuckled.

"When we got to Marysville, we faded into thin air; you couldn't say we bust up, we just decomposed and went off the map. I found myself in 'Frisco, after riding the rods till I felt like a cat after a talk with the bulldog. And I stayed here nearly three years. Tried pretty nearly everything in that time, from 'bouncer' in a saloon to bell-boy in a gilt-edged hotel. I tended bar, and helped old Sing Quong Loo run a fan-tan outfit on the Barbary coast, and was messenger boy for a bucket shop where they educated innocent plungers who wanted to be real devils, and showed them how to bet on imaginary horse races. Some of it was crooked, of course, but I managed to live, and I made some friends. I liked the straight game best, and when I could I worked my way East again, and went back to the show business. I

By the Lights of Chinatown 269

always thought there was money in it, and I still think so. If there is, I'm going to get it.

"Last August I found Lyter sort of trailing along like a ship without a rudder, and I adopted him. He needed some one he could think he was bossing, but who was really capable of bossing him, and it seemed to me that I was elected! I tied up to him for the season."

He drew a long breath.

"There,—that's finished, thank the Lord! I never talked about myself before, but if you're asking a girl to marry you, it's up to you to put her next to as much about yourself as you can. Jane,"—his voice dropped and broke a trifle,—“you see the sort of life I've led. It's been brutal and tough from start to finish, only it isn't the finish yet! I am bound to succeed, and I'm going to have something worth while to offer you. Won't you say—please—that there's some hope for me?—Gee!” he exclaimed suddenly, in honest amazement. “I bet I never said ‘please’ before in all my life!”

Jane laughed out, though there were tears in her eyes.

“I can't,” she said, gently. “I can't. . . . It all seems so strange, so unreal, your asking me like this!——”

"It seems strange and unreal to me, all right!" he responded, curtly. "I never expected to ask any girl to marry me. I've liked women a lot——"

He stopped hastily. There were things he did not feel called upon to talk of to Jane.

"Is it because I'm so rough—such a brute?" he demanded shortly.

"No; I don't think it is. I don't believe you really are a brute anyway."

"Oh, don't you!"

"No, I don't. But—I don't want to marry you, Mr. Brainerd; that's the absolute truth."

"You mean you don't care enough for me? I understand. But I can make you care,—or else I'm no man, and don't deserve you—not," he added more humbly, "that I could ever deserve you anyway! . . . But—you don't care for any one else. You haven't known anything about caring yet, but—you've got it in you! I'll swear you've got it in you!"

"Aren't you forgetting Otho?" said Jane very quietly.

Tom started.

"By heaven, I was forgetting the fellow!" he exclaimed. "He's a hard thing for me to remember, somehow. See here!" he stopped short, and

By the Lights of Chinatown 271

stood looking down at Jane. "Are you throwing me over for that chap?"

"It isn't a question of my throwing you over, it seems to me," Jane replied stoutly. "It would be a question of my throwing Otho over for you, wouldn't it? And I won't!"

Even in that uncertain light, she could see his face flush so violently as to be almost unrecognizable. He breathed hard and painfully and seemed to struggle with some masterful agitation, either of suffering or fury, before he was able to speak.

"Jane," he said thickly, "I'm going to get you yet. I love you, and, whether you know it or not, it is in you to love me. And if I can't get you one way, I will another. I've tried to be halfway decent to Lendrick for your sake; I've even had a try at the Quixotic stunt, and covered up his rotten, asinine doings as well as I could. But no more! After this I'm going to let you see for yourself just exactly what you're up against,—what you've tied yourself to: a weak, vain boy who'll never grow up, who'll never be any sort of a man——"

"A genius!" flashed Jane.

"Maybe! But I bet you'd find a genius about as comfortable to live with as a Persian cat!

They're expensive, but they're a darn sight more trouble than they're worth to bring up. Otho can't hold anybody's real interest unless he plays to them,—and I don't suppose you want him to play to you all the time? He isn't a man, I tell you,—he never will be a man!"

"I thought *men*," said Jane, very white, "didn't talk like that about other men!"

"Probably I ought to be crushed by that, but I'm not! In the first place, Jane, I don't count Otho Lendrick a man; and in the second place, if I did, I'd say this all the same, for I value your happiness a good deal more than I do any conventional ideas about what's honourable and what isn't."

"My happiness!" Scorn shook her voice.

"Well, let's say I value *you* more. And I believe that you'd be unhappy with Lendrick."

"And happy with you?"

"I think so. Anyway, it's a theory I propose to back with all I have or am."

"Even your honour?"

"Yes, even that if necessary."

"I am trying to control myself," said Jane, speaking slowly, "but I think you are the most loathsome person I have ever met.—I have to keep reminding myself——"

By the Lights of Chinatown 273

"That I love you?" he said huskily.

"No! you don't really love me, or you couldn't say such horrible things. I have to keep reminding myself that you were—nice to Jab."

"Thank you," said Tom, with a twisted smile. "It's a pity Jab isn't here. I have an idea that he'd put in a good word for me. Get down to cases, Jane, even if it is a brutal business. Otho is a weakling; he can't drink without getting drunk; he can't tell the truth,—not won't, but can't, and there's a difference. He's a slacker, a moral coward, and a liar——"

"It is you who are the liar!" said Jane, trembling and with her eyes coal-black in her ashen face. "But if what you say *were* true, and he *were* as helpless as all that,—he'd need me all the more!"

She turned, and walked away. After a breathless pause, he followed her, under the strange, dreamlike lights of Chinatown.

CHAPTER XX

AT GROGAN'S

Grant that the pow'rful still the weak contreule;
So drives Self-love, thro' just and thro' unjust,
To one man's pow'r, ambition, lucre, lust:

How shall he keep, what, sleeping or awake,
A weaker may surprise, a stronger take?

ALEXANDER POPE.

THE rest of Lyter's people were evidently improving their last night of unprofessional freedom, also. For, just as the four were leaving Chinatown they came upon Alice, Gertie, Fench, Dixon, and a mild youth named Keener who played the villain when he had to, and could sing coon songs with a fair accent.

Charlie looked rather sheepish when he saw Otho, but merely grinned and said, "Oh,—well!"—and they let it go at that. After all, who would stew indoors mulling over a part when he could be out doing the town?

Headed by Gertie, they hailed their comrades with shouts of enthusiasm; it was apparent that

their sightseeing expedition had resolved itself into seeing how many places of refreshment they could thoroughly inspect in a given time. They were now proposing to "go on to Grogan's," a well-known dance hall in the vicinity, though not in Chinatown proper.

Nettie agreed promptly, and Otho, too, seemed keen about it, so there was no choice for Jane. In any case, she was slightly curious to find out what that sort of place would be like. She thought that Tom frowned somewhat on the proposal, and glanced at her in an enigmatic way, but in another moment he seemed to come to a decision which made him almost reckless; for, with a geniality most unusual in him, he cried:

"Good enough! Grogan's sounds good to me; —I'll buy the first drinks!"

To Jane's surprise, he linked his arm in Otho's, and, as they walked east, talked to him quite familiarly and cordially. She was not sure that she approved of this sudden change of mood. Her uncannily acute intuitions rang a little warning bell somewhere inside her brain. Tom Brainerd was playing some sort of game for some sort of reason. She watched Otho and him perplexedly and rather anxiously.

It was not a long walk to Grogan's, and they were soon seated at two tables under lights as glaringly bright as theatrical calcium.

"Ever been here, Tom?" asked Charlie Dixon, in a slightly patronizing tone. Having been to the coast once before, he liked to air his experience and pose as one who knew his way about in all manner of strange purlieus,—especially when he was in Brainerd's presence.

Tom did not glance up from the cigarette he was rolling.

"I used to tend bar here," he remarked, with neither levity nor self-consciousness.

Dixon laughed.

"A joke, of course!" he said. "I suppose you mean it's all an old story to you!"

But Jane knew it was not a joke. She looked about her curiously. Naturally she had never been in a dance hall before.

This was of a type common enough in the West. The center of the room was clear for dancing. On either side were small iron tables with moderately solid chairs,—they had to be, at Grogan's. At one end was the platform where the pianist and incidental performers were stationed; at the other the bar itself,—very gorgeous and imposing, indeed,

with its shelves packed with glittering, many-coloured bottles, and its heavy mahogany wood-work showing off in a brilliant manner the glasses of varying shapes and sizes, which were ceaselessly manipulated by the two alert young bartenders. A little way above, a gallery ran all the way around the room, divided by low partitions into a species of box arrangement, where, again, were tables and chairs. There were dark curtains hung at the back of these boxes, through which waiters, guests, and the short-skirted, highly rouged girls who contributed to the evening's entertainment, continually passed in and out.

On the walls of the room below the gallery were paintings of nude, cherub-faced, very pink-fleshed women floating over flamboyant red roses and purple lilies, or reclining upon bulbous clouds streaked like Neapolitan ice cream.

From the platform came the raucous voice of a worn-out cabaret soprano, shrilling to a heavily thumped accompaniment, the indecently inappropriate sentiment:

"How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood——"

"Oh, won't she ever stop!" complained Nettie, fidgeting. "What is the good of that truck? I

want to dance! What an awful looking thing she is, anyway!"

"She looks dreadfully tired," said Jane.

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Nettie callously. "Those people are used to it. Besides, what work is there in standing up and shrieking a few songs? Tom, I thought you were going to buy drinks!"

"Sure!— Hello, Tim! Didn't know you were still running this joint; thought it was your kid brother, or some one with your name. Put on side since my day, haven't you?"

A stout, smiling man with shrewd blue eyes had stopped to shake hands with Brainerd. He was introduced to the party, and bowed as low as his portly figure would permit.

"Any friends of Tommy's are welcome,—any friends of Tommy's!" he proclaimed in a fat, unctuous voice. "Ladies and gentlemen, what will you have on the house?"

He confided, as the drinks were being brought, that "Tommy" had been the best bartender he ever had. When at last he waddled smiling away Nettie was flushed and frowning.

"How *could* you notice him, Tom!" she muttered angrily. "And to admit that you were a barkeeper!"

"I'm proud of it,—I was a damned good one. Tim Grogan's one regular sport and a good friend. Here are your drinks, girls and boys, and there goes a turkey trot on the spielbox. Which will you take first, drinks or dances?"

They elected to take the drinks first, and he ordered another round. Then they rushed off to dance the remainder of the number. Jane, sipping seltzer, watched them from the table where she and Tom were left alone. Nettie and Otho were dancing together, she guiding him through the intricacies of a new step. He did not know anything about dancing, but he had the sense of rhythm instinctive in the true musician, and they looked very well as they circled about the floor.

"Want to dance?" asked Tom suddenly.

Jane jumped in her chair, as though she could not believe her ears. She forgot her late anger, and stared at him in complete amazement.

"I never dreamed you could dance!" she exclaimed ingenuously.

He grinned like a little boy. Either he, too, had got over his fierce mood of an hour before, or he was deliberately trying to force her to ignore it.

"I used to win prizes at it when I was a kid," he informed her, standing up. "Come along, and we'll show the rest of them a thing or two!"

Before she really knew what she was doing, she was swinging down the room with him to a melody so infectious that even the uninspired pianist could not play it without spirit.

As she danced, Jane had a new and curious experience. She became for the first time in her life conscious of herself as an individual. Always before that moment she had thought of herself only in relation to other people, to conditions, to responsibilities, and to possibilities. Always she had been a small, unimportant part of a whole; and now, all at once, she seemed to see herself as a complete personality at last, one who might even matter somewhat in the scheme of things. The ego, long asleep in little Jane, opened its eyes and stretched its unaccustomed wings. It was not, and never could be, a selfish ego, or a vain one; but it knew itself to be alive.

Tom Brainerd danced perfectly, and, in his strong light clasp, Jane danced as some poet has said that the morning stars may dance to the music of the spheres. The gay, bubbling, popular air made a golden sea whereon she tripped on toe-

tips that just touched the crests of the shining waves.

Down in the centre of her secret being a flame of infinite delight started, growing and growing, burning higher and more gloriously with each throbbing, breathless, rapturous moment. . . . Life! It was a voice that sang in her ears. Life,—Youth,—and Joy! Nothing but those three things counted, for ever and ever, Amen! . . . No pain, no struggle, no disappointment, no cruelty, no regrets, no burdens,—only the golden sea of life whereon to dance with winged feet made only to touch the shining waves in time to an infinite, ecstatic music. . . . Life, like this,—always dancing so; always thrilling so,—held so by. . . .

Jane stood still, panting. For just a moment, Tom's arm remained about her, but only for a moment.

"What—what has happened?" she faltered, unsteadily, vaguely, putting up her hand to her face.

Tom looked at her in an odd way, and then with an effort turned his eyes away.

"The music has stopped," he said.

"Was it only the music?" said Jane in a dazed whisper. "It seemed to me to be much more than the music—that—stopped. . . ."

By the time that the third order of drinks had gone around, Otho was noticeably flushed and unsteady. Jane, in whom the strange madness experienced during her dance with Tom Brainerd had faded to a chill of reaction, was nervously anxious to get them all home. But everybody laughed at her when she suggested it.

Tim Grogan himself came over with the ironic toast of "Happy days!" and a jovial offer of another round "on the house." Tom told the waiter to make it double all around. The thing seemed hopeless.

Jane in desperation turned to Brainerd, and said, under her breath:

"Can't you see that Otho is taking too much to drink?"

"I can," rejoined Tom coolly. "And he looks as though he were due to keep on doing it for quite a bit yet."

Jane drew back, astounded and hurt by his tone. Could he be drunk himself? She looked at him suspiciously, but he was deadly sober, with a hard, almost a wicked coldness in his eyes.

"You could stop him," she murmured, bewildered.

"How?" asked Tom calmly, unmoved. "Shall

I take him by the hand, and gently lead him home to bed? I don't believe he'd altogether like that you know, baby as he is!"

"You could make the move for everyone to go," persisted Jane, unaccountably obtuse.

Just for a moment Tom met her eyes.

"Why should I?" he demanded. "Here, boy, take the orders!"

Jane sank back in her chair, sick at heart, frightened for the first time in her fearless life. What did it all mean? Otho was singing one of the airs that he had composed, beating time on the iron table before him. He looked awkward, ridiculous, utterly unlike his handsome, attractive, boyish self.

And then, all at once, Jane understood; that nameless fear in her heart turned to a rage that made her choke, and sent a red mist before her eyes. Tom Brainerd was deliberately letting Otho get drunk; he wanted him to make a fool of himself before her! Had he not said that he would make her see what she was tied to?

She turned upon him with all her indignant soul flaming in her honest eyes. Tom met her gaze calmly, and without apparent comprehension. Evidently the man had the courage that goes with consummate and unscrupulous brutality.

Jane rose slowly to her feet.

She was as white as paper, but her voice was quiet and steady, as she turned to Otho.

"I am so tired!" she said, "you'll see me home, won't you, Otho? I'm afraid to go alone."

Otho pulled himself together with an instant instinct of courtesy which touched her almost past bearing. As he stood there, swaying slightly but somehow bearing himself like a gentleman in spite of it, she felt tears scald her eyes. Tom sat and looked at him with neither sympathy nor disapproval, [as he might have looked at a total stranger.

Charlie Dixon, who was fond of Jane, and grateful for her little acts and words of kindness and friendliness, rose too.

"I'm going anyway," he said. "We'll drop you at your quarters, then Lendrick and I will go home together. We are hanging out at the same house, you know."

The party broke up then, though reluctantly. Jane and Dixon walked on ahead with Otho between them. The actor steadied him good-naturedly and unostentatiously as they walked. Little Jane's head was erect and she carried on a one-sided conversation with Otho, with perfect

self-possession and an air of completely ignoring anything unusual.

"Thoroughbred, — thoroughbred!" muttered Fench, who had grown pensive and reminiscent with the advancing night. "I had a daughter once. If she had lived she would have been a thoroughbred like that! They don't make them like that every day, let me tell you, sir!"

Tom Brainerd said no word in answer. His hands were thrust deep into his pockets; his face was grimly set and dark in look as the night sky above him.

CHAPTER XXI

JANE PLAYS A RESCUE SCENE

Something thou hast to bear through womanhood,

Some coldness from the guarded, some mistrust
From those thou hast too well served, from those beloved
Too loyally some treason; feebleness
Within thy heart, and cruelty without.

E. B. BROWNING.

"ONCE more!—Run along and take the call, Nettie, it's yours all right. You too, Charlie. Go ahead, Jim! No, there won't be another curtain. Hold it, there. Sounds all to the good, doesn't it? All right there, Jim?—*Strike!*"

And Tom Brainerd leaned against the wall by the electric switchboard in the wings and wiped his dripping forehead with a sigh of relief. The much-dreaded, much-longed-for first night in San Francisco was over.

It was eleven o'clock,—that nightly goal of weary player folk,—and the curtain was down. God knows, and God alone, how many actors, bearing up under the misery of bad parts, the

Jane Plays a Rescue Scene 287

ignominy of personal failure, the anguish of bodily pain, or the sharper, more grinding torment of grief or anxiety, have commanded their wry lips to a smile, and forced tenderness into voices rough with suffering by that mystic, comforting shibboleth: "Eleven o'clock has got to come!"

The magic word "Strike!" had sounded.

"Strike" means nothing to most of you who read this. You have never waited for it, tense in every nerve, aching in every muscle; waited for it as you would wait for food, or drink, or sleep. "Strike" means to the player what "Rest arms" or "Break ranks" or "Dismissed" means to a soldier. He is free to be a human being for a little while.

Actually and visibly, it means that the stage that was a "scene" a minute ago, turns in the speed of an eyewink into an untidy, barnlike place, heaped with dead illusions and frequented by a special and singularly sorted type of genii known as stage hands. The aforesaid magic word, in this particular case, had let loose these genii upon a gay garden lately the background of the loving vows of Nettie Llewellyn and Charlie Dixon, and changed into a heap of disillusioning painted boards.

The actors were racing off to their dressing-

rooms, calling congratulations and complaints as they went:

"You were great in that scene, Net!"—"Say, Tom, if you let that fool Keener queer my second act speech again—" "Gertie Mills, you cut in on purpose that time"—"Hey there, Jane! Never thought you could do it, kid!"—"Jane, oh, you Jane! How do you like being a ragamuffin? Say, you looked great,—about ten!"

Jane had played the part of a boy, and done it so well that everyone, including herself, had been amazed. She had found it great fun, and had gambolled through the rôle with so much sheer heartfelt joyousness and spontaneity that even Lyter had felt the anxious lines of his face relax at the sight of her.

Yet, after all, that first night was not destined to be a pleasant memory for Jane. Before she had time to go to her dressing-room and change, the doorkeeper appeared, looking for Lyter. He was not a prepossessing doorkeeper; he had weak eyes, and a womanish appetite for gossip.

"It's that young feller that gets out after the first act, sir," he said. "I wanted to speak to Mr. Lyter about him."

Lyter had gone to talk with the property man,

so Tom explained that he was authorized to take messages for him.

"Well," the man maundered, "I don't know his name, seeing you're all so new yet, but he's got a sort of Mamma's Boy look about him, and light, curly hair——"

"I know," cut in Tom. "What about Mr. Lendrick, Cohn?"

"That his name? Well, seems he got into some sort of trouble down the street,—kind of row, sir——"

"Otho!—In a row!"

It was Jane who spoke. She had heard the name, and stopped to listen.

"It's probably nothing," Brainerd quickly reassured her. "Go ahead, Cohn,—how did you hear about it, and *what* did you hear?"

"Why, one of the boys ran 'round the corner to Kelly's bar after a glass of beer, and this chap,—Len—whatever you call him,—was hot at it with a big bruiser who seemed to be lickin' the life out of him. Stewed, he was, too, John said."

"All right, you may go back to your door," Tom said brusquely.

Some of the others had gathered around and were listening with interest. They were sorry for

Jane, but not any too sorry for Otho. Though he was an engaging sort of person when he liked to be, he had managed to antagonize nearly all of them at one time or another.

"Well, Tom," said Fench, "how about it? Going after your infant as usual?"

Jane started and stared with wide eyes; but Tom's jaw hardened.

"No!" he said, and turned away.

"Getting tired?" queried Keener. "I don't blame you, old man! You've had your troubles, and that's no lie!"

"Mr. Brainerd!" Jane broke in. "Will you please go and find out about Otho for me?"

She was puzzled and she could not help being confident that he would not refuse her. It was inconceivable that any one would refuse a request like that.

To her astonishment, Tom turned on her with his face dead white with passion save for his blazing eyes and the veins that showed purple on his forehead.

"No, by God!" he rasped at her. "I won't! I'm through!"

He wheeled, and walked unsteadily away into the shadows of the dismantled stage. Jane looked

after him; and something of dismay and repulsion must have been in her look, for Fench, who, being a comedian and old, was remarkably wise, said to her gently:

"Tom has dry-nursed that boy so long I reckon he feels 'most like a father to him! Maybe he's got some fool notion of teaching him a lesson."

Jane did not answer a single word. She turned quickly away, and ran, without speaking, into the dressing-room which she shared with Nettie Llewellyn.

Everyone thought that she had gone to take off her makeup, and Charlie Dixon hurried through his dressing in order to be on hand to go anywhere and do anything he could for her. But when he knocked at the dressing-room door, Nettie's voice answered him, rather crossly:

"Jane? She's gone mad!" she told him. "She came in here like a typhoon, put on a long coat over her stage things, and beat it! If she went out of the theatre in that rig, she's probably been run in by this time!"

Dixon started for the stage door, and bumped against Tom Brainerd, who also seemed to be in a hurry.

"Brainerd, she's gone!"

"Gone!—Who? Where?"

"Jane. She's gone to look for him, of course!"

Tom grew very pale.

"I was just going to run round to Kelly's myself to make a few enquiries," he said, as though he hated to admit it.

"So was I. But she's beaten us to it, I guess."

"Well, we'd better get a move on," said Tom briefly.

In silence and as fast as they could, the two men made their way to the corner saloon known affectionately in the neighbourhood as "Kelly's Own."

At the door of the barroom, Tom Brainerd stopped short and stood as though struck motionless. For the scene before him was quite the strangest he had ever seen.

In the sordid, grimy little room, with its sloppy bar-counter and foul air, was a crowd of unusually disreputable men, all tough and most of them drunk. One of the biggest and drunkest and most ruffianly looking of them was standing in the crouching attitude and with the clenched hanging fists that commonly follow the delivery of a blow. And on the floor lay Otho Lendrick, deathly white, with a stream of blood from his chin onto his immaculate collar.

Jane Plays a Rescue Scene 293

Beside him stood Jane, in her boy's suit, but without her wig, her bright red hair tumbling about her shoulders and her small face ghastly under the makeup she had not had time to take off.

"Go for a doctor, Charlie," said Tom quickly, and Dixon raced off without a word.

A big bony man, evidently the proprietor, advanced scowling into the room.

"See here," he bellowed,—and immediately you knew that he was the blustering kind and not the acting,—"I run a respectable place——"

"Oh, dry up, Kelly!" growled one of the men. "Say, Bill, that was a knock-out all right!"

"Teach him to be fresh!" snarled the fellow with the clenched fists.

"Maybe you've croaked him, Bill," suggested a friend encouragingly.

Bill looked uncomfortable, but he held his ground.

"Teach him to get fresh!" he reiterated, with drunken obstinacy.

Jane blazed at him.

"*You* didn't knock him out, you disgusting brute!" she cried with a furious edge in her voice. "He fell against that iron thing over there and cut his chin, and that made him faint. But don't you

go away thinking it was your doing! You are nothing but a bully, and bullies are always cowards! I don't believe you could stand up to anything on two legs. He could have thrashed your ridiculous life out if he hadn't happened to trip!"

The men began to guffaw loudly and coarsely; even the bully grinned.

"Say, sister," he said, with a smile that he doubtless believed to be ingratiating, "do you always wear them togs? And is it them that makes you so damned cocky? Gee! You're some little boy, ain't you! I wouldn't mind having a pal like you in my business, if——"

His leering eyes travelled over her from head to foot. Tom, unseen at the door, set his teeth and took a step forward.

But Jane, as it happened, did not need help.

Barney O'Reilly must have chuckled in his grave at what followed. The men gathered in the barroom had a confused general impression of a small cyclone having struck the place without due warning. Jane's red hair flared out from her face like flaming snakes; her eyes absolutely snapped with rage. She flew at big Bill very much as a wild cat might fly at a buffalo. And there and then, to the thrilled and awed delight of the audience,

she proceeded to administer to his repulsive countenance as thorough a boxing and beating as it was ever likely to receive this side of its eventual doom.

He tried to keep her off, but he might just as well have tried to keep off a determined hornet. She struck his eyes and nose and mouth with a strength and speed that were nothing short of uncanny, and she was only willing to stop when she wrenched an involuntary grunt of acute discomfort from her victim.

"Now, if you please, go away as fast as you possibly can," ordered Jane, breathing fast but still undauntedly truculent. "If you stay, I might really lose my temper!"

There was a roar of laughter from the assembled toughs. Before it, the big man, once their hero, turned and fled. It is a strange and sad fact that it was his chivalry that destroyed him. He could undoubtedly have fought Jane to her downfall; having contented himself with merely defending himself from her onslaughts, he was laughed down and laughed out. In her heart Jane recognized this, and when one of the young fellows aimed a blow at the fallen idol, she interposed with a sharp:

"Everything's satisfactorily settled between—gentlemen! What are *you* butting in for?"

"What's the matter with the kid?" yelled the men. "She's all right!"

Jane, her rage past, was kneeling beside Otho, anxiously examining his cut chin. Dixon and the nearest doctor came in together and followed them.

"Only a couple of stitches," declared the man of medicine after a brief examination. "He'll be as right as ever by tomorrow."

The room was emptied of its too interested patrons, and the stitches taken. Otho could not stand pain, so Jane, under the doctor's directions, administered a few whiffs of chloroform. When it was over, she glanced up and, for the first time, saw Tom Brainerd who had been patiently handing sutures to the doctor.

Her face hardened instantly, and she bent once more over Otho.

"There, honey," she crooned tenderly, "you're all fixed now! I'll get you to bed right away, dear."

"I'll take care of him, Jane," said Tom, speaking for the first time.

Jane looked at him as though he were a stranger.

"Thank you," she said, without expression. "It won't be necessary to trouble you."

Jane Plays a Rescue Scene 297

Tom walked away in silence. At the door he said to Dixon:

"Stand by if you can, Charlie. I'll be hanging round somewhere near by, but she won't stand for my doing anything, and she may need help."

Dixon nodded, and Tom left the saloon.

"No directions," said the young doctor, shutting his bag. Keep him quiet;—here's a sedative if he gets too restless, but I don't believe he will. See if he has any fever,—his pulse will be fast if he has,—and tell him to come to see me tomorrow."

He looked at Jane with some curiosity, for he was only human. But doctors are inured to strange and bizarre situations, so he accepted this painted young woman in boy's clothes as the prospective nurse in the case, and tried not to feel too inquisitive as he departed.

"I'm going back with you, of course, to take care of him," Jane said to Charlie decisively.

"You can't, Jane. It's a man's hotel; no women allowed."

Jane scowled, considering this obstacle a minute.

"All right," she said at last. "Then I'll take him back with me."

"Jane, you're crazy!"

"Why am I crazy?"

"You can't!—You two girls alone!"—Poor Dixon was frightfully uncomfortable.

"Oh, rot!" said Jane, inelegantly but with emphasis.

Paying no attention to Charlie's protests, she continued: "It's perfectly simple. Nettie can sleep on the couch in the parlor, and I'll sit up with him anyway."

"He'll be all right in the morning, sure thing," said Dixon. "But, Jane, don't you want me or one of the other fellows to stay with you?"

Jane twinkled.

"Sort of a house party?" she suggested. "My dear friend, do you know how much room we have in our flat? It's a tight squeeze for Nettie and me. The only way we can get Otho in at all is to put him to bed and keep him there where he'll be out of the way, and not underfoot! You may help me get him there, though, if you like."

A policeman strolled up to the door of Kelly's Own, and remarked:

"Somebody said there was some rough-house round here."

"Shut up," said Tom Brainerd, from a shadow.

"Can't you see some one's ill? The lady is taking him home."

At four o'clock in the morning, Jane, yawning sleepily, felt her patient's pulse, and rejoiced to find it quiet and steady. Otho himself, however, was distinctly querulous. He was thirsty, and his head ached, and he was much exercised over the possibility of a scar upon his handsome chin.

"Don't be such an old peacock," said Jane good-naturedly. "The doctor said it would hardly show at all. And while you have to wear bandages, you can pretend you're a Sultan or a Mogul or something like that, with a turban."

"It's like you to make light of it," said Otho coldly.

"I'm sorry," said Jane, hurt. "I'm sorry I ever see the funny side of anything. Honestly I am."

And she was.

"Here's some milk," she said, forcing a cheerfulness she did not feel. "If you're thirsty, it ought to taste rather good."

Otho drank the milk discontentedly, and in the light of the grey dawn surveyed Jane with growing disfavour.

"What an awful wrapper, Jane!" he said, looking at the brown flannel garment which she wore.

"Isn't it?" said Jane, in cordial agreement. "Shall I wake up Nettie so you can have something pretty to look at? Her newest kimono is very decorative!"

"I'm afraid I've put Miss Llewellyn out most awfully," said Otho, in quite a different tone. "She is so sensitive that it must have been quite a shock to her to have me brought in like this."

Jane stared. It showed, she thought, a decidedly original point of view to find anything sensitive about Nettie.

"Her nerves could scarcely bear the strain," she remarked dryly. "She is now sleeping the sleep of emotional exhaustion on the parlor sofa!"

She really could not help hoping that he could hear Nettie snoring, but he did not seem to notice it.

"You are very lucky, Jane," he said with some severity, "to have no nerves and no temperament yourself!"

"Rather!" said Jane cheerfully. (What a ridiculous heart hers was, to go on having twists like that!) "If I had nerves or a temperament, I should be denied the joy of sitting up with you all night, Otho!"

She yawned.

Jane Plays a Rescue Scene 301

"Go to sleep like a good boy; there's time for you to get a nice nap before breakfast."

She turned out the gas and went across to the window. There she stood for a while, looking out at the pearl-tinted morning world. She was more tired, body and soul, than she had ever been before. And for the first time in her sweet and wholesome life, her sense of humour was somewhat grim.

CHAPTER XXII

AND TOM STAGES A RESCUE OF HIS OWN

To see, and dare, and decide: to be a fixed pillar in the welter of uncertainty.

THOMAS CARLYLE.

ONE week from that night, cold despair reigned in the Merry-go-round Theatre where Lyter's company was playing. It was a type of despair unknown outside the theatrical profession, and its chill was deep and very gripping. They were going to close up.

The word had gone forth;—not officially as yet, but only like the cold little first breath of winter that creeps ahead of the penetrating final frost, and kills the garden things. Their poor little season in 'Frisco, to which they had looked forward so longingly and for which they had toiled so valiantly and faithfully, was a bitter, barren, unqualified failure. In their own jargon, they were a "frost"; they were "dead"; Lyter had "failed to deliver the goods"; and they were all "down and out!"

Poor Lyter himself was crushed. He was, as everyone knew, an honest, well-meaning man, and he had consistently done his best for his people even when it meant a loss to him. It was a genuine blow to him to find himself and them in a shipwrecked condition. Not the least of his troubles was the realization that he had not been able to keep them above water after they had trusted him and stood by him.

To do them justice, most of them had the characteristically generous attitude of actors in adversity.

"Poor old chap!" muttered Dixon—who had regained his health by this time and felt sufficiently fit to patronize any one. "He feels this like the devil!"

"Feels it! Well, I hope he does!" cried Nettie spitefully. "When I think of——"

Suddenly and without warning, she began to cry hysterically, and Jane patted her heaving shoulder with a soothing hand.

"We're all in the same box," said Keener mildly. "It's not up to us to be down on poor old Lyter. He's losing more than any one."

They were having a consolation meeting in Nettie's and Jane's dressing-room, between the

second and third acts. Nobody had any change on, and Otho was off after the first, so that they had fallen into the way of foregathering nightly for cigarettes and arguments. As a rule the talk was confined to merely more or less casual "shop"; discussions of certain lines and effects, professional gossip,—not to say scandal,—mutual banter, occasional recrimination, and a great deal of the warm, good human chatter that makes everyday life worth living: the ordinary give and take of ordinary people who know each other very well, and are neither better nor worse than their fellows.

Tonight there was a minor chord underlying all their chatter. It was all up with the show, and they were each and everyone of them out of a job.

"Lyter's lost the most!" insisted Keener, in his gentle way. He was a man of no personality, and no one ever remembered him; yet he could think, and he had a way of reminding other people that they could think too.

"Yes!" exclaimed Nettie Llewellyn, lifting her head. "And next season he'll do it all over again. Next season he'll scrape together some more money and take out another company; and there'll be a new bunch of poor—of poor——"

She seemed to hesitate.

"Suckers?" suggested Keener, in his mild voice.

"Yes,—suckers!" cried Nettie defiantly. "Another bunch of poor suckers to work like the devil, and then suddenly wake up, the other end of nowhere, and—walk home!"

Fench shook his head.

"No," he said quietly. "Lyter's dished, this trip. His nerve's broken. He's not as young as he used to be. He's through. Lyter's through. When we close up here next week, Lyter closes up. He's pretty nearly ready to cash in."

"Not"—Dixon looked startled.

"No, he isn't going to commit suicide," said old Fench. "But he's through, for all that. His heart is just about broken. I don't know what will become of him, but the day we ring down here for the last time will be Lyter's exit cue. He'll drop out; and, wherever he goes, we'll never hear of him again."

They were silent. They sensed dimly a tragedy bigger than theirs. Most of them were very young, and this was only one of their early disappointments, crises which they might reasonably expect to meet before making good. But they knew instinctively that it was different with Lyter.

Fench was right. The failure of the 'Frisco season would come close to breaking his heart.

"I—I wish I had some money!" burst out Dixon impulsively.

Otho looked up in obvious irritation. He had been sitting on a trunk scowling moodily at the floor.

"Oh, tell us some news!" he exclaimed. "Of course none of the rest of us wants any money by any chance!"

"Don't be a grouch, Lendrick," said Charlie Dixon good-naturedly. "For once in my life, I wasn't thinking of myself. I—I'd like to stake old Lyter,—honest to God I would!"

Fench put his hand on his shoulder.

"The wish is supposed to be father to the deed, my boy," he said. "But I am very much afraid that this one will die childless!"

There was a silence.

"We—we ought to have had at least four weeks more here," said Alice Cooke, winking to keep back the tears. "And if we'd made a hit it's a cinch we could have got more time. I know the regular stock company doesn't come in until late in June. And we had to get so many new clothes,—and not a cent saved——!"

She choked. It was common knowledge that she took care of a mother and sister somewhere in New England.

"I'm going in for a cabaret job," declared Gertie Mills shortly.

"Gertie! You aren't!"

"I certainly am! The starving heroine was never one of my happiest rôles. I'm a soubrette, and if I've got to go under, I'll go under dancing and listening to champagne corks! Rolly Evans of the Tyrolean will give me a try-out. And I can die cheerful anyway!"

"Where's Tom Brainerd tonight?" asked Fench. "Ever since this news began to get around, I've had a sneaking idea that Tom would do something about it."

Jane spoke for the first time.

"You talk," she said with conspicuous and rather surprising scorn, "as though Mr. Brainerd could do anything he wanted to!"

"Well, that's pretty nearly right," Keener said seriously. "Brainerd's a bulldog when it comes to holding on!"

Otho laughed, echoing Jane's scorn willingly enough.

"Well, your precious bulldog seems to have let

go this time," he said. "He isn't even on the job!"

Fench looked frankly puzzled.

"That's right," he said. "I haven't seen him tonight.—Well, children, there's the act! Come along. We who are about to die——"

They all hurried off.

Jane was not on again, and she went in search of Mr. Lyter.

He was standing alone in a stage entrance, staring at the stage without seeing anything, a big, unlighted cigar in the corner of his mouth. He chewed and chewed at it, and his bony hands clenched and unclenched themselves at his sides. He looked old and broken, and the ready tears filled Jane's eyes. Just a second she hesitated fearing that sympathy would hurt him more than silence. Then she came forward impulsively, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Dear Mr. Lyter," she said. "I wish there was something we could do to prove our gratitude. You've been so awfully, awfully good to all of us!"

He started, and looked at her in a dazed way. Then he pulled himself together in a measure, tried to smile, and patted her hand with fingers that were icy.

"It's just—money kid," he said in a low voice. "Just money. If I could raise the cash, we could keep going,—I know we could,—and——"

He choked a rising emotion and looked about him wistfully. "I wish," he murmured, "that Tom were here. I've grown to depend on him, and I miss him,—I do miss him! But I guess he's gone to look for another job. I don't blame him. He's a sharp fellow, and he never made half what he was worth with me——"

"*Mr. Lyter!*"

Brainerd's voice, crisp and peremptory, sounded in their ears. He was standing just behind them, a little flushed and breathing quickly. Evidently he had been walking very fast, to say the least of it. His eyes were bright as though with some uncontrollable exultation, and he smiled the warmest, sunniest smile that either Jane or Lyter had ever seen on his face.

"It's all right, sir!" he said, with a suppressed excitement that made him look almost boyish. "I—I'm afraid you thought I'd deserted the ship. But the truth is, I had a scheme I wanted to think out."

He paused and laughed.

"You know, sir, I've been pretty nearly every-

thing in my day," he went on. "And I've run across pretty nearly every kind of man there is! I stand pretty well with most of them. I don't know that that's much of a compliment, considering what they are and what they do for a living. But anyway, I made good while I was with them, and—they're willing to back my word any old time when it comes to cash!"

Again he laughed, with that new, odd excitement. He was like a child who can hardly wait to tell some delightful secret.

"Well, sir, I went first to Tim Grogan where I used to tend bar——"

"Tend bar!"

"Yes—And Tim says I was the best he ever had! He came across on the spot. And then I tried old Sing Quong Loo,—you remember him, Jane!—he used to run a fan-tan joint and I helped him. He's always said I was the only white man he knew whom he could trust. And there's a chap you wouldn't know who used to be a crook but is a triple-plated philanthropist now. He's never been able to see why I wouldn't borrow money from him before! And one of my old wrestling partners has struck it rich too, and is blowing it in here in 'Frisco!"

"Brainerd," gasped Lyter. "What, in God's name, are you talking about?"

"Don't you understand, sir?" And Tom's voice was all at once as tender as a woman's. "You've been as square as they make 'em, and—and I've been proud to do for you what I'd have been ashamed to do for my good-for-nothing self! I've asked my old friends for money just to tide things over, and I've explained to them what a corking risk it is, and how safe they are with a man like you, and—Oh, stop it, Mr. Lyter! It's all right, sir,—it's all right now!"

For the manager's head had gone down into his hands, and his thin shoulders quivered.

"You can get the extra time here now, you see," proceeded Tom gruffly, trying not to show how much he felt. "And we can go back to Broadway with flying colours. And you can begin right away getting your company together for next season; my 'touch' will run to that. Those reprobates of mine are rich men!"

Jane tried her best to ignore the lump in her throat, but it was there just the same. And, psychologically prompt, down came the curtain just then, and Lyter threw up his head. His haggard cheeks were wet with tears.

"Say, people," he gasped unsteadily, "Tom's got the money!" He flung out his arms in a gesture that was strangely, unconsciously dramatic.

"Say, people, I won't have to throw you down!" he cried hoarsely. "I won't have to throw you down after all!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SPINNING OF THE TOP

That motley drama—Oh, be sure
It shall not be forgot!
With its Phantom chased for evermore,
By a crowd that seize it not,
Through a circle that ever returneth in
To the selfsame spot. . . .

EDGAR ALLAN POE.

THERE are times when things happen so fast, come so thickly, and affect us so vitally and bewilderingly, that the merely human entity is dizzy and confused, and feels itself to have no more intelligence, volition, or responsibility than a gyrating top. Some monstrous hand has set the thing in motion, and it spins on giddily, conscious neither of pain nor pleasure in its revolutions, and entirely open-minded as to where it is going to bring up.

From the hour of Lyter's redeemed and eventually successful little season in San Francisco, Jane O'Reilly felt herself to be such a top, spinning out

into the future too rapidly to permit of much observation.

One spin: and she was in New York.

Surprising to relate, she found it precisely as she had always dreamed it would be.

"I believe it's second sight!" she said to herself. "I *knew* the skyline would look exactly like that!"

They were coming across the ferry from New Jersey, and it was past sunset. Though they were facing the east, they had the exquisite faint rose of the afterglow as a background for the purple skyscrapers in their magnificent raggedness. A pin point of light here and there gleamed like jewels. Manhattan was dressing for her nocturnal revelry.

"The boats wear them too!" murmured Jane, unconscious that she spoke half aloud.

"The lights?" asked Tom at her elbow.

She wondered how he had known what she meant. He had a queer way of doing that which was restful to her in some moods and in others oddly irritating. She had a certain reluctance in admitting that any one else could really enter into the passing phases of her feelings. She and Brainerd were on fairly good terms now, though her flesh

The Spinning of the Top 315

crisped whenever she remembered the night in Chinatown. She did her faithful best to forget it.

"What a wonderful salt smell!" she said, leaning on the railing of the ferryboat.

Tom looked at her curiously.

"You had plenty of it in 'Frisco," he said.

Jane shook her head.

"Not like this!"

"Well, this isn't so clean, I'll admit!" he said, with his shrug.

"Perhaps," remarked whimsical Jane, "that's why I like it! It's—it's—" she was staring, fascinated, at the coal barges and river-craft of all kinds busily moving on the rippled old-silver of the water—"it's a big, useful smell, somehow! On the Pacific it's only adventurous,—or that's the way it strikes an outsider, a tenderfoot. It's utterly wonderful,—like the opening of a door you've always wanted to see through. . . . But here—people are living so hard they wouldn't recognize an adventure if they met it face to face!"

"Because it would be such a stranger to them?" said Tom.

Jane grinned.

"No!" she flashed, "because it'd be so familiar,

such an old everyday story, that they wouldn't notice it—oh, look at that sky!"

"Makes a good back drop," said Tom. But the vision moved him too.

Another spin of the top.

. . . . And she and Nettie were in a little room in one of the Broadway hotels. Nettie knew the house manager, and they paid only two thirds of the regular rate. They were high above the street noises, but the noises rose to them clamorously, steadily, an unspeakable roar of an insistent life that would not be ignored. At first Jane felt that she might as well be living in an iron foundry. She got used to it.

"Gee," laughed Nettie, "isn't it great to be at home on Broadway again!"

Jane looked at her in real wonder.

It seemed extraordinary to her at first that any one should think of this wild shuffle of life as "home." Yet, as she realized almost instantly, when she stopped to think of it, there were plenty of people who could feel at home nowhere else.

Then came Otho's voice over the telephone, telling her in wild delight that Brainerd had been a real friend; that through him he had met Filmer who had a libretto, and Estein who had money.

It looked as though Tom really meant to get the opera on, and these big men evidently had every confidence in Tom. It was all magical. Some things are all magical in this world, though they can usually be explained by some very simple and dull cause. Tom Brainerd's success seemed meteorlike and incredible; as a matter of cold fact, it was rooted in years of hard work, honest values, and grim determination.

The top spun on. And then—how, Jane could never quite understand—the impossible had happened. Brainerd, with Mr. Lyter as partner, was putting Otho's opera on. Filmer's libretto, *The Featherweight Girl*, was generally appraised as a "wonder," and everybody was already spending the money they were going to make!

And Jane was going to be the star.

She had never dreamed of being featured in any stage production. She knew nothing about acting, and she could not sing at all. But she was the Leading Lady; she was the Featherweight Girl.

This much was made clear to her with some difficulty. She was so appallingly sensible that they could not simply throw a thing like that at her head and expect her to accept it without due investigation.

Finally, it was injected into her understanding that a star does not necessarily have to possess the vocalization of a Melba nor the histrionics of a Bernhardt, in order to make good. They wanted Jane to dance; they wanted her to laugh. She chanced to do both very well indeed. Above all, they wanted her to play the part of Jane O'Reilly; to be herself for three hours every night. And to be that, to Otho's music, especially worked out for her setting and accompaniment!

"De bersonalidy,—dad iz id,—de bersonalidy!" wheezed old Estein.

Jane wished he wouldn't wheeze. It reminded her painfully of Mr. Molling Weede.

Of course she knew she could do it. Otho's music was adorable: it got into her blood and made her feel as irresponsible as a frolicking lamb. You would have to be less than human if you could not do well to such an accompaniment. But it seemed too preposterous that she should be anything except a supernumerary. She had quite expected to have some high-salaried comic opera prima donna for their fixed planet.

But she always remembered one day when Tom Brainerd came to see them with a manner that meant business.

"You know about Lendrick's music," he said abruptly. He was scowling, and his voice was without sentiment. "They all tell me his stuff is pretty good."

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed Jane fervently.

If there was any change of expression in Tom's face, she did not see it. He proceeded, indeed, as if she had not spoken:

"You know I'm putting on *The Featherweight Girl* with the help of Lyter and Estein. Filmer has done the text. He's been hunting good, fresh music for years, and he likes this stuff. Here's an A-I librettist, and Lendrick's fortune is made if his score is halfway up to the mark. It's a good gamble all round. But we need a star. We're all agreed that the lyric soprano, and the soubrette, and the comedienne, and the baby-eyed chorus graduate are pretty well played out. They're cold, and there's an end to it. There's room, though, for something new. There's a place waiting for a girl who can go on and be herself,—the sort of self that people will love. . . . Jane, I guess you're it!"

The thing seemed crazy to Jane at first, but she had to come to it when everyone came at her with it, all together, and all, more or less, at the same

time. Her head seemed to be spinning as fast as her existence, and she never, from morning till night, had a moment in which she could really pause and think.

She was the more giddily at sea because she was obliged to admire both Tom and Otho more sincerely than ever before. Although in such different ways, they were each making good superbly.

And then, one day, after they had been rehearsing for a month and everything was going splendidly, Tom asked her to come to his office,—a recent grandeur,—for a business interview.

She went, of course, and for once her intuition failed to warn her.

Tom sat at the desk, looking very large and solid and overpowering. His expression was remote, unresponsive. He was preëminently the Big Man engrossed in big affairs. It was not a pose, Jane saw, but a fact. There was, perhaps, a wilful emphasis of the situation, as though—was it possible that he needed everything he could think of to support him in something which he was facing?

"Jane," he said, not looking at her, "I've asked you to marry me before."

She smiled, almost a tender smile.

"Yes, Mr. Brainerd."

"You're just as determined?"

"Yes; just."

He picked up a paper cutter, and with it drew patterns on the big blotter in front of him. Though he seemed to give this operation his full attention, there was something blind about his eyes.

"Lendrick's opera score is going to be a fine one," he said, much as he had said it before.

Jane jumped, startled by the change of subject. Before she had thought of anything to say in answer, he had once more begun to speak:

"It'll be a big thing for him,—naturally. Most fellows work half a lifetime to get where he is. He'd be pretty well broken up if anything—happened."

"Happened!" gasped Jane. "You mean if it were a failure?"

"No. If it shouldn't be produced at all."

"But"—her head began to go round,—"*it's all settled, isn't it?*"

"Subject to the decision of the producer after the rehearsals."

"Well," she exclaimed, rather impatiently, "aren't you the producer?"

"Yes, officially."

"Well, then—!" she laughed relievedly. "What

on earth is it all about? You almost frightened me for a moment! But, being the producer,—why, you'll produce it, that's all!"

"I am to use my judgment, after seeing the rehearsals," Tom reminded her in a hard, steady tone.

"But"—she flared—"you know the rehearsals have been magnificent! Everyone's just crazy about the show!"

Tom threw down the paper cutter with a clatter.

"See here, Jane," he said roughly, "I had a long game mapped out. I was going to point out possible weak places, and suggest the power I had, and so on, and do the thing with some finish. But I can't—not with you. You're too straight. And whatever else I am, I'm straight too. I've got Lendrick where I want him. I can shelve his opera for ten years if I like, and he knows it if you don't. I bought the option, and he's living on that now; he can't pay it back. And I've got you where I want you, too—No, not that!" His harsh voice broke just for a moment. "Where I want you, Jane, is in my arms. But—I know you won't marry me under any ordinary conditions. So I'm making extraordinary ones."

He stopped, steadied himself, and forced him-

The Spinning of the Top 323

self to meet her clear though horrified gaze without flinching.

"If you will marry me, I will put that opera on," he said boldly. "If you don't, I'll lock it in my safe, and he can whistle for a manager until Judgment Day. That's the proposition, Jane; it's up to you."

And for the first time in weeks the top seemed to stop spinning. Everything was very still.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BARGAIN

Alas, that love, so gentle in his will,
Should be so tyrannous and rough in proof!

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN the top ceased to spin an enormous quiet fell on the office where Jane and Tom Brainerd sat. A silencing, muffling hand had stilled all things. There was, suddenly, a vacuum of sound, almost a vacuum of sensation.

An odd thing! It was midsummer and very hot, but, all at once, the room was very cold. The arresting hand which had temporarily stopped disturbance of all sorts, had also stopped the disturbance caused by a high temperature. You sat there inert, in a deep chill that was equally divided between the body and the soul.

At last Jane spoke.

"Do you mean," she said, very quietly indeed, "that you are driving a—bargain?"

"Yes, Jane. I'm afraid it's just that."

She had known it, of course, before he spoke, yet the simple admission of the monstrous thing made her draw back uncontrollably, and catch her breath.

"And you know," she found herself saying, fairly steadily, "that I shall always hate you for it for ever and ever?"

"I know of course that you think you will. I hope it won't work out that way."

"Suppose it does?"

"It's a chance I've got to take, Jane."

Jane grew very white.

"It's not a chance," she exclaimed breathlessly.

"It's not a chance! It's a certainty!"

"So much the worse for me," said Tom, with the odd, painful smile she knew so well.

"You—mind very little," she said, controlling herself.

"Yes? . . . So little that I am holding on to the arms of my chair here, not to spring up and take you, and hold you close, and—try to wake you up! So little that—" He broke off, and laughed abruptly. "I wouldn't talk like that to a man who—loves you, Jane," he said.

"Loves me!" She trembled from head to foot, and it was scorn that shook her. "You

don't surely pretend that it's *love* you feel for me!"

"It's a pretty good imitation, dear."

"*Love!*"

"What do you think it is?" he asked her quietly.

She hesitated. She looked about her wildly. She had a feeling, an impression, but she did not quite know how to put it into words.

"It seems—it seems," she brought out chokingly, "that it only means your superior power to make me suffer. It only means that you are stronger than I——"

"Oh, my dear," he interrupted, wonderingly, "is that all it really means to you?"

She looked at him as though mesmerized as he leaned toward her and took her hands into his. As he did so, she noticed his own hands. They should have looked cruel and ruthless, to fit into her idea of him; but though they were big and strong and shaped for power, they were not brutal hands,—their touch now was the gentlest she had ever known in all her life.

"My little, dear, crazy, beloved girl!" he said to her as she had not known men could speak to women. "Must you always think of me like that?"

"Oh, probably not!" said Jane. "Doubtless

I shall think of you in a much worse light than that some day!"

She spoke hardly, and he started at the tone as he released her hands and leaned back in his chair. He had never before heard that hard note in her voice. Pain, righteous indignation, all things fiery and alive, seemed natural to think of as associated with eager, vivid, generous little Jane. But that she should be hard! And that it should be for the man who loved her so!

But, in his own way, he was a wise man and a patient one. He had his intuitions, faulty or otherwise, and he was too good a business man not to know how to wait. He interpreted Jane's new mood-manifestation as a desperate and exceedingly feminine attempt at self-preservation. Her secret, delicate fortresses of being were in danger. Her affections were, so to speak, under fire. What more humanly, and in a measure reassuringly, natural, than that she should summon to aid her defence forces and guards for which she had had no previous occasion?

"All right, dear," he said, gently and gravely. "We'll wait and see. I suppose you mean that as a—husband—I shall be even more awful than just as a lover."

"I object to the word 'lover'!" snapped Jane. "I was never very sentimental, but I certainly have had my ideals as to what a lover ought to act like!"

"Jane," said Brainerd quietly. "I can make love. Don't make any mistake about that. And it's rather hard not to make love to you. But that isn't necessary between you and me. You aren't a vain or a foolish woman. I am not a man who lies and sneaks and coaxes love out of a girl——"

"No," said Jane. "You prefer to bully her."

"Just so. Of the two methods, I do prefer to bully her. Though take it from me, it isn't half as amusing as you seem to think it is. What I really want is to have her recognize her own love. And when she does—there won't be any coaxing nor yet bullying; it will just be there, a free gift. And as for making love,—love isn't made, dear; it comes ready-made from whatever God there is."

"Did you get that out of a book?" asked Jane cruelly.

"I dare say," said Tom. "If I did, it doesn't make it any less true. A few true things do come out of books, you know."

Jane rose from the chair in which she had been forcibly holding herself.

"Very well," she said with a look of ice and fire together. "I accept the terms of your proposition. Have you no legal agreement for me to sign?"

"I think," he said with a faint smile, "that we can wait for that till we get to the Church Registry." (Was there nothing that would make him show that he was even a little hurt?)

"Very well, Mr. Brainerd."

"By the bye, don't you think you could cut out the 'Mr. Brainerd' stuff?" he suggested quite casually. "We're engaged, you know."

"Engaged!"

She looked at him, and suddenly she burst out into laughter that it cut him to hear.

"Do you know," she exclaimed, "I never thought of the word 'engaged' in the right way before! You engage a clerk or a cook, don't you? Why, 'engaged' just means 'hired'! So I'm—engaged!"

She ran out of the office still laughing. And she was still laughing when she reached the street; but there were tears on her cheeks as well. She walked home to the hotel, though it was twelve blocks, and her legs felt none too steady. And she bumped into people rather blindly on the way.

She entered the room which she shared with

Nettie, seeing it and her with new eyes. She had an idea that the whole world was going to seem different to her henceforward. Nettie was swathed in a kimono, cleaning a lace collar. The fumes of the gasoline were suffocating.

"What an awful smell!" murmured Jane almost vacantly. "Nettie, put on mourning, or your best clothes, or something. I'm hired. I mean—I'm engaged."

Nettie tipped over her bowl of gasoline, and swore at it feebly.

"Who is it?" she demanded, with wide eyes.

"It's Mr. Brainerd who has—hired me." For the first time in her life Jane took a bitter joy in being coarse.

Nettie's expression changed ever so little.

"Oh, you mean a new part!" she exclaimed with a smile. "At first I really thought you meant——"

"Quite a new part," declared Jane recklessly. "I am going to marry him."

"Jeannette!"

"Yes. Exciting, isn't it?"

"You seem to find it so!" said Nettie, watching her. "I never saw you look like that before. . . . Well! I am surprised. So that's been your game all along, you sly little thing! Well! I'm sure I

wish you luck. Maybe he'll treat you better than he treated me!" added Nettie, with frank ill-nature.

Jane had not the slightest idea why that one sentence should affect her so poignantly. She only felt all her blood fly to her face, and she knew suddenly that she hated Nettie more than any one in the world,—always excepting Tom Brainerd!

Otho took the news peculiarly.

He was not really in love with Jane, of course, but he had a profoundly proprietary feeling about her. Needless to say, he was not instructed as to her reasons for the proposed marriage with Brainerd. He could only suppose that she had all at once decided to accept him because he was going up in the world so certainly and so fast. Consequently, Otho felt vaguely aggrieved. Was he not doing pretty well himself? Besides, he would never have thought it of Jane—never!

They had a gloomy little interview while waiting for *The Featherweight Girl* company to assemble for rehearsal one morning.

"I—it sounds asinine, Janet," Otho said, with just a touch of sentimentality, "but truly I've thought all along that you—cared for me!"

"So I always did care for you, Otho," said Jane,

rather wearily, but her eyes were tender. "And I've never cared for you more than I do now."

It was true enough.

"Then, for heaven's sake," demanded Otho, in genuine and irritated astonishment, "what are you marrying that fellow for?"

Jane checked the impulse to cry: "That's why!" and, instead, answered carefully but truthfully:

"It seemed—the wisest thing to do. Mr. Brainerd is in a position to—to do so much—to control so many things——"

"But—hang it all, Jane!" Otho's sensitive face flushed hotly. "It—it seems so unworthy, somehow! I know I haven't any right to talk to you like this! But—but—you've always seemed such a straight little thing; so unselfish, and clean and,—I simply can't see you doing a rotten mercenary thing like this without butting in. I know I've no right——"

"No right at all," said Jane steadily, though her face was absolutely colourless. "But—you're a very dear person, Otho."

She spoke in her old, old fashion, that always made Otho feel like a foolish little boy.

Rehearsal commenced, and they separated without further word.

Jane seemed, with her position, to take on a new shell of self-preservation and reticence. Always a social, friendly, gregarious soul (in spite of her occasional wild urges toward solitude), she suddenly became the opposite. She found that she could not endure even old friends around her, and, without much altercation, severed her domiciliary connection with Nettie and took a place by herself in a pseudo-Bohemian quarter. It was a dilapidated studio building, and she was not particularly comfortable, but she cared nothing for all that. She wanted to be alone, and she was alone. It was not a bit good for her, as it happened.

"I always liked you," Nettie protested plaintively, when they separated for good. But it was rather a half-hearted protest, after all. Nettie was not in any way too good for this wicked world, and she had found Jane's unconscious but unquestionable virtues rather a trial. "I always liked you," she reiterated, "even though you are such a little oddity!"

"Try to overlook my past misdeeds!" Jane said with just a flash of her old-time gaiety. It passed, however, as a breeze passes, and she added, rather pitifully: "We've had such *nice* times together, Nettie, honey!"

After she had really gone, Nettie asked herself what possible times Jane could have had with her which had been especially nice. Though she was not gifted with imagination, Nettie was constrained to admit that it could be only Jeannette's own sweetness of character and lenient point of view that had hit on the advantages of their situation. And Nettie vaguely resented this,—the more, perhaps, because nobody in his senses could call Jane O'Reilly a prig. She was just—the Real Thing.

Tom Brainerd troubled Jane very little. He treated her with the conventional courtesy and consideration that was tacitly demanded, but not much more. He was a trifle more punctilious now than before. He let his unreserved impulses appear less candidly before her. He was absolutely polite and thoughtful, and from first to last he made her position as his fiancée understood by everyone. She was, it appeared, to get the perquisites without the penalties. But none of this softened her toward him.

She had only this: she was vaguely grateful that he did not try to make love to her. That, she owned, would have been more than she could bear.

The hot days wore on. And they took toll of

strength and courage and vitality in their passage. Jane looked like a wraith. The rehearsing company was more ragged than a frayed violin string. It was, in short, the usual attitude and atmosphere before a big, new production.

And one day, Tom, who had been secretly worried about her beyond words, decided to take the matter in hand.

"Jane," he said, in the tone that he habitually used toward her nowadays,—a tone which held in it deference but no individual claim,—"don't you think,—before you're married,—you ought to look up your family?"

Jane felt rather queer. It was awful to realize that she had hardly ever thought of her family in all this time. She must be a very curious, heartless person, she decided with much remorse. Then she looked at Tom, marvelling. How did it happen that he had thought of her family,—her own family? It had never crossed her mind!

"Don't you think," he repeated, "that you ought to look them up?"

"My family? They don't care anything about me," declared Jane, simply and sincerely.

"How do you know?" he asked.

She stared at him.

"They never cared," she cried vehemently. "They were self-satisfied and indifferent! They lived a smug, comfortable existence. They didn't care what happened to me, as long as they had no responsibilities!"

He was looking at her.

"It doesn't sound like Jane, somehow," he remarked reflectively.

Jane's head drooped.

"It sounds—awful!" she murmured. "I know! But lately I seem at sixes and sevens. Everything comes out wrong, whatever way I start at it! What do you want me to do about my people?"

"I only want you to be, now and always, Jane. And Jane should know that her mother loved her, and would suffer to hear that she had—married—without telling her anything about it."

"I don't think that we need go into that," said Jane with a hardened face. "As for my mother,—she never took much interest in me."

"I am inclined to believe it," said Tom Brainerd, frowning. "It would explain."

Jane's green eyes were a question.

"You see, you certainly take little enough interest in *her*!" he elucidated with a laugh.

Jane shivered.

"I'll go,—I'll go, of course!" she gasped, well-nigh incoherently. "But can I leave rehearsals without being a nuisance? And when am I to go? And have you heard from them? And—is 'Dosia all right? Oh, please tell me everything!"

Tom smiled secretly as he searched in his pocket for some letters circled by an elastic band.

"Read these," he suggested, "at your leisure. As for your questions: you can start when you please. The rehearsals here can go on without you because you have your part all right anyway and can slip back any moment you like. You will be gone nearly a month, and——"

"Oh, I can't stay in the Molling Weede house as long as that!" Jane exclaimed impetuously.

"You don't have to!" he told her. "You have another errand. You remember your dwarf woman you told me about in Pico? Well, I knew you were lonely without Jab, and I sent out there to get him for you. She wrote in answer that you had promised to come back yourself when you wanted to reclaim him. It's all in one of those letters I've given you. I suggest that you go to visit your mother and sister first, and then go out and get your dog. The dwarf lady seems keen about seeing you in person. And then——"

Tom turned away without looking at her.

"You are going?" he asked.

"I—I suppose," she faltered, "that it would be proper."

"It would be kind," he said. And for some reason she was surprised.

"I told you before they didn't care about me," she said.

"And I asked you before: How did you know?"

"How did I know!" She checked her obviously defensive attitude. "Well, since I'm going——"

"We'll open early in September. You'll want to be back a fortnight ahead."

He turned away.

. . . "Tom!"

Jane had never called him that before. As he wheeled toward her with an illumined face, she started back, panic-stricken.

"I—I didn't meant it!" she said shakily.

Tom Brainerd, halting, drew a quick breath.

"Perhaps you will, some day!" he said.

. . . And yet the only word she had said was —"Tom!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE PAST REVISITED

. . . Perhaps I lived before
In some strange world where first my soul was shaped,
And all this passionate love, and joy, and pain,
That come, I know not whence, and sway my deeds,
Are old imperious memories, blind yet strong,
That this world stirs within me. . . .

GEORGE ELIOT.

It had been less than a year.

Jane felt very strange when she entered again the house of the Grand Panjandrum. It was, to be sure, the same house, and the occupants were not radically altered. Yet there was a difference. She did not at first realize that it was in herself.

Eventually, she grasped the painful but basic fact: the Molling Weedes had stayed where they were; she had gone on. At least, it seemed that way. She felt infinitely, incredibly free before them. They struck her as tremendously shackled and weighted. Her mother nearly broke her heart in her flabby, unfeeling ineptness. Mr. Molling

Weede had solidified a bit with the months. He was less soft and unctuous, and more genuinely superior. It was clear that his business was doing well and that it agreed with him.

The change that had arrived in Jane was an odd and a subtle one. She did not come back to her Home Town as a harbinger of fashion; she bore no emblem of sophistication. Yet she could not help knowing that she had grown out of her old-time atmosphere. She was different,—ineffably different,—and to tell the truth, her own people were the first to recognize the fact. Something of definite growth had entered into the change as a matter of course. For people made like Jane are made to grow. She had not grown away from the place where she had started; she had only, by processes of evolution, developed until she no longer fitted in there.

Her arrival, decently heralded by letter and telegram, was a queer function. As usual, Mr. and Mrs. Molling Weede were seated in that awful dining-room. The Grand Panjandrum wheezed a greeting; her mother suppressed, rather heroically, an obvious inclination to tears. A surreptitious glance showed that 'Dosia was not there.

Before Jane had a chance to try any of her faith-


fully prepared sentences, Mrs. Molling Weede startled them both. She threw up her head, with an attempt at independence which touched Jane deeply.

"I want to talk to my daughter," she said. "I want to talk to her alone."

Mr. Molling Weede looked at her almost affrightedly. She must, indeed, have seemed a trifle mad to him. Where had she acquired that unheard-of aspect of initiative? He saw that it must have come from Jane. His wife had inhaled some of the open air of liberty which the girl had brought in with her. Accordingly, Jane was responsible, and he did not love her the more for it.

Jane and her mother went together to the silent gloomy parlour which was usually held sacred to Great Events.

"Jane, my dear," said Mrs. Molling Weede, and the tremble in her voice seemed a part of the tremble in her vast, unhappy body, "I've been a very bad mother to you. Yes, I have. I know it. There is no use mincing matters. I'll even admit that in a way I was glad,—at first,—when you disappeared like that. Oh, I'm making a clean breast of it! You see—*he*—was always fussing about your queer ways,—you never would try to please



him,—you know! And—and—I'm not a strong woman," said Mrs. Molling Weede, weeping, "and it seemed more than I could bear—that it did!"

Jane patted her shoulder sympathetically, and waited. She was unexpectedly moved by these confidences of her mother's. Poor, dear, helpless thing; she must have suffered terribly.

"I said I was glad,—that time,—didn't I?" whispered the big sobbing woman. "Maybe I was, too, in a cowardly way, just at first. But Jane, I got to thinking of you. I got to lying awake at night wondering what had become of you. It made me an old woman, Jane!"

She was sitting in one of the deep, stiff old chairs. Jane stood a moment blindly remembering that Tom had thought of this,—Tom had understood. . . . Then she dropped to her knees and hid her face in her mother's lap.

"I never dreamed," she breathed brokenly, "that you truly—cared!"

She raised her wet eyes, and what she saw in Mrs. Molling Weede's face made her bow her head again. For, even on that flat, large countenance, it was quite a marvellous look.

"My dear," said the mother with a strange dignity that only comes to mothers, and only to them

when they are stirred to the roots of their maternal being. "My dear, when you have brought a little bit of breathing life into the world, and know that it came from you and through you, you can never stop caring as long as you have a brain and body to care. They call it mother love. I don't know what it is really; it just is. You're my baby, Jane. When you have a baby of your own, you'll understand."

Jane was crying in silence. Very gently, her mother slipped away for a moment or two, letting the girl's head rest against the deep cushioned seat instead of her knees. . . . She was back almost at once. Jane, lifting her tear-stained face, saw a picture of her father held before her eyes. It was only a faded cabinet photograph, but it was, in truth, the face of good-for-nothing, merry, fighting Barney O'Reilly.

"Take it with you," said Mrs. Molling Weede. "I've always kept it. He had his faults, my dear, —Lord knows, no one saw 'em plainer than I! But he was a good, big, kind, *free* man. And, after all, you're his girl!"

Jane kissed her without speaking.

"Doshia?" she asked then, in a longing whisper.

"She's upstairs," said Mrs. Molling Weede.

"She's married, you know, to Bert Matthews. They live with us for the present."

Jane fled up the stairs.

Theodosia sat on the edge of the big bed, sewing. She looked up, and seeing her sister, began to whimper. The two hugged each other speechlessly, while the Molling Weede dinner bell pealed in their ears, unattended.

"Poor Bert!" sobbed 'Dosia. "He's a failure, you know. And nowadays, he takes my troubles as well as his own—Jennie, how nice you look!"

The sisters gazed into each other's eyes, tenderly and wonderingly. They really loved one another.

"Oh, Jennie," wailed Theodosia suddenly, "I'm going to have a baby!"

Jane stared at her as though she stared at the First Mother. Then, quite naturally and simply, she slid to her knees before her sister.

"Oh, lucky you!" she whispered yearningly and lovingly. "Oh, lucky, darling you!"

'Dosia was far more matter-of-fact.

"You're going to be married. You'll have one of your own some day," she said, sensibly. "Not that I'm so blessed crazy about it!"

Jane sat very still. That she was to have chil-

dren had never crossed her mind. The very thought of it seemed to send a secret, wild glow through all her being. . . . Children? . . . Babies? . . . For her? . . . It was a delicious dream.

But her stirring womanhood shrank as the strongest sex-impulses do shrink, from the life principle itself. You will find that the stronger the sex-urge, the stronger the sex-defensive.

Jane was an unusual woman. She wanted her children: those given her by nature, willed her by God. But when she thought of their potential father, she shuddered with what she believed to be repulsion.

God knew what it was, and smiled.

Jane did not stay long with her family. She did her duty, and, by way of an extra luxury, indulged her sentiments a bit over 'Dosia and her prospective baby.

Then she headed West again.

When she arrived in Pico, Miss L. Madden was on the point of death. Jane found that her first duty was to feed the dogs; the little dwarf woman had faithfully cared for them until she was beyond the mere physical power of crossing the floor. Jab was well and seemed happy when he saw her

But the natural joy that Jane felt at her reunion with him was quenched by her genuine grief over Miss Madden.

"I was sure you would come!" said the dwarf, nodding her huge head.

She was in bed, but she contrived to move her head and arms almost as freely as though she had been up and about. Around her crouched and whimpered dogs of all kinds. It was evident that they loved her: they pushed themselves close to her, when it was possible, and their subdued cries made the air sad. . . .

"You are going to be married," she said. "He wrote me."

"Yes."

"That is good," said the dwarf woman, not tentatively, but as one having authority. "You love him."

"Love him?" Jane flared up. "Why,—I *shrink* from him, Miss Madden!"

The dwarf dismissed that with a wave of her short arm. Clearly, she looked upon it, even if true, as an unimportant detail.

"You love him," she repeated positively. But she spoke in the same expressionless tone that Jane had heard from her lips before, when uttering

oracular soothsayings. "He is your mate. You will marry him."

"I know *that*!" Jane could not help putting in rather bitterly. "I have to!"

"You will marry him. And you will be glad. He is your mate. You will find out later that you love him; that you have loved him all along."

"That is nonsense!" said Jane angrily. "He knows that I will never love him!"

Miss Madden smiled. "Does he?"

"I have told him so."

"You have told him what you think is true. But why should he wish to marry you if he does not hope that you will come to love him in time? Marriage is very—close, my dear!"

Jane flushed in a queer sort of spiritual agony.

"There could never be anything of *that* sort between us!" she exclaimed.

"And why not?" asked Miss Madden.

Before Jane had found her words, the dwarf put out a small, clawlike hand to touch her very tenderly, and spoke:

"I have read stories of men who went through their marriage service without demanding anything more. 'Parted at the altar,' and all that sort of thing! I always thought it stupid and unbeliev-

able. If it is a matter of money, the really disinterested man can look out for the woman he loves without going through any ceremony! Any man who wants to be altruistic, or whatever he likes to call it, can do it. He doesn't have to turn himself into a husband for the purpose!"

She sank back upon the pillows, white and inert. Jane administered brandy, and Jab quivered as dogs do when death stands near.

"When a man demands marriage," said Miss Madden, "it's because he means and wants—marriage! Make no mistake about it. But thank your stars that it is so!"

Her eyes closed, and her face looked leaden. At intervals she roused, and even petted her "children," the nondescript dogs that pressed close to her.

In the hours of the vigil, Jane saw queer glimpses of her,—views that she would never have let the world see willingly. Often she muttered, uttering odd aphorisms or quoting old philosophers.

"Happiness is not an essence," she asserted seriously. "You can't buy it in concentrated form. It only comes after years of work,—and then half the time it doesn't come at all! There is no extract of happiness!"

A little later Jane asked:

"Won't you please tell me what your first name is?"

"Lilith," answered Miss L. Madden. "Wasn't she the Other Woman in the Garden? I have always wondered why my mother chose that name. I suppose she couldn't have known just what I was going to be like when I grew up! . . ."

It was three o'clock that night when she said:

"You will marry the man you love?"

Jane nodded, but she did not know how to answer in words.

Jane had never before thought about herself at all. She had had no personal problems. She had lived so solely for others that she did not know how to live her own life. There had always been one inevitable way to feel and to act. The ever-important thing was the Other Person's point of view; she had to get that as far as might be, and shape her own course accordingly. Jane had not been only unselfish: she had been almost selfless. And the necessity of deciding, judging, hoping, fearing, thinking for her own destiny, was a task both novel and confusing. She did not like being consciously and responsibly a Person! . . .

In the California dawn, when the light was far

fainter than at moon-high, the dwarf woman's face went white and blank.

Jane was sitting close to her, stroking her hands. Still she was not sure.

When Jab clambered into her lap and pressed his trembling nose against her breast, she knew that their friend was dead.

CHAPTER XXVI

CLIMAX AND ANTI-CLIMAX

. . . Why was I
To cross between their happy love and them?
To stand a shadow by their shining doors,
And vex them with my darkness? . . .
The brightness of a burning thought, awhile
In battle with the glooms of my dark will,
Moon-like emerged, and to itself lit up
There on the depth of an unfathomed love
Reflex of action. . . .

ALFRED TENNYSON.

It was the first night of *The Featherweight Girl*.

The thing was done. The sacrifice was made.
Otho's melodies would drift across the footlights
into the ears of New York tonight.

Jane had utterly lost what she had for a space
discovered: her own individuality. She had seen,
like something in a dream, what an identity might
be like. But, seeing further what that might
mean to her, she had abandoned her vision in
sheer terror.

She had finally brought her own personal issues

down to hard pan. As she sat before her mirror that night, she knew that though she had no joy in the future she had nevertheless assured the future. Otho had composed a fine opera; and it was through her that it was going to be produced.

Her dresser, the wardrobe woman, tramped forward, in her solid, cheerful way.

"Mr. Brainerd, ma'am!"

They were alone together.

"Hold on a minute!" said Tom Brainerd, in rather a queer voice. "Don't make up just yet, Jane. I want to kiss you first!"

He laughed, and awkwardly touched her forehead with his lips. Tom's caresses were apt to be shy and difficult affairs. It was, perhaps, paradoxical; he had always had "a way with women," and it was a novelty to find himself at a loss. But Jane was different; he could not treat her easily, cavalierly, as he had treated his lights o' love. If he merely touched her hand, it must be with a special consciousness, a definite and hampering sense of her beautiful desirability. Tonight there was something unusual about him; something, in a way, desperate, as though he were facing an issue with terrible potentialities, either for or against him.

"They've called the half hour," Jane protested. But she sat still and waited. With her hair pulled back in a screwed-up knot to be out of the way, her little pale face seemed smaller and whiter than usual. With that ghost of a pucker between her brows, she looked like a worried child.

Tom came over to her deliberately, and lifted her bodily from her chair. Then he sat down himself, still holding her tight, so that she lay in his arms as helpless as any baby, but by no means as submissive. Though she made no effort to free herself, he could feel her whole body grow tense and rigid with resistance. He bent over her until his face almost touched hers, and whispered hoarsely:

"Jane!—can't you love me?"

"Let me go!" gasped Jane. And now she did struggle,—very desperately, as though for her life.

But he still held her fast, lifting her against his heart. His breast heaved as though he had been running.

"There must be some spark of feeling in you!" he muttered passionately. "By God, I'll *make* you feel something, for once——!"

He placed kiss after kiss on her mouth,—deep, long, searching kisses, kisses that were brutal in their violence, that hurt her, choked her, made her

faint and dizzy and horribly afraid. Then he let her break from his clasp, and rising himself, stood facing her.

Jane's hat and long grey veil hung on a hook close beside her. She put out her shaking hand and drew the end of the veil across her face. She pressed it against her hot and aching lips as though its softness could soothe them.

"Jane," said Tom unsteadily, "when a woman trembles like that under a man's kisses, it means one of two things. Either she loathes his very touch, or it arouses her own passion. On your soul and honour,—which was it?"

With blazing eyes Jane looked at him, and she thought that she told the truth as she answered, panting:

"With all my heart and soul and strength, *I hate you!*"

Tom stood silent for a moment, then turned to the door.

"That's enough," he said roughly. "That's all I wanted to know!"

He went out of the dressing-room, leaving the door open; it seemed as though he had not been able to see it.

"Fifteen minutes!" called the boy outside.

Eliza, the dresser, came back, and Jane, sick and quivering, hurried into her costume.

First nights are always nightmares. This one, as a matter of fact, went rather well, though nobody knew it,—nobody, at least, in any way connected with the show. It is a strange truth that the success or failure of a production registers last with the persons responsible for it. Gloom envelops a whole company that has just played itself into everlasting fame, and a fatuous joy radiates from the brow of the manager who has just put on something that the Dead Watch have pronounced the worst yet.

There were the usual number of curtain calls, and everyone had to come out and bow, and look pleasant. Being a comic opera it was a three act affair, and after the second, there was a general round of applause which justified almost any one in going on to take a call. Rather to everyone's surprise, Tom Brainerd elected to take it himself. He was not well-known on Broadway, and there was a certain vagueness about his welcome, as he walked out before the curtain. But it was obvious that he had something to say, and everybody waited interestedly to hear him say it.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, in his curi-

ously harsh, vibrant voice, "we are all very much obliged to you, but that isn't what I'm here to say. I'm here to make an announcement. You have indicated that you like the music of Mr. Otho Lendrick, and the dancing of Miss Jane O'Reilly. Being a theatrical man, I suppose I am partial to theatrical effects. Anyway, this seems to me a good time to announce the engagement of Mr. Lendrick and Miss O'Reilly. If this piece is a hit it will be a jolly good wedding present for them! And I'm much obliged to you for listening to me!"

Jane, standing in the wings, heard him. Her mouth opened, and her eyes became empty. Such moments, so funnily tragic, so painfully comic, come to all of us. But all of us are not cursed with the deadly dual faculty of appreciating the contradictions to their bitter dregs. Suddenly Jane began to laugh hysterically.

"Dear, blessed imbecile!" she whispered. "He honestly thinks he's making me happy!" Luckily nobody heard her.

It was a black hour for Jane. Afterward, she could not see how she had lived through it at all, for she had to accept the astonished congratulations of the company, and she had to dance her weary way through the whole of that awful last act.

Otho was conducting, and she thought, with another hysterical giggle, that he appeared slightly appalled himself when he looked up at her. She tried to keep her eyes as well as her thoughts away from him and away from Tom. But she found her brain grinding out a terrible iteration as relentless as a ticking clock:

"I'm not going to marry Tom. . . . I'm going to marry Otho. . . . I'm not going to marry Tom. . . . Otho! Otho! . . . Not Tom. . . . Never Tom any more. . . ."

As you may have learned before this, it chanced to be Tom whom Jane loved. Having only just found it out herself, it came the harder to her.

At the end of the performance, she fled to her dressing-room and shut out the world.

"Buck up, Jane!" she told her ghastly reflection in the glass. "The joke is on you. Be a good sport and see it through, my dear, or I've no use for you at all, at all!"

Eliza answered the knock on the door, and announced:

"Mr. Lendrick, ma'am!"

Jane could feel the unctuous felicitations that were hinted by her tone.

"I am dressing. I will see Mr. Lendrick to-morrow."

"Yes, ma'am!"

There was certainly a shocked or at least a hurt intonation in Eliza's faithful acceptance of this. It was plain that she considered it all wrong, out of order. Of course Miss O'Reilly should have seen her "young man." Personally, Eliza thought Otho too entrancing for words. . . .

But Miss O'Reilly was a difficult person to-night. And queer enough it was, too, as Eliza confided to the assistant wardrobe woman. Wasn't it the very first evening she had been regularly engaged, so to speak?—Announced and all, by the manager himself. And now to act like this! Most unbecoming to be sure, whatever way you looked at it.

"Eliza," said Jane, in the careful and painful way which is the only way when one is in great trouble, "I want to get out of this theatre without any one's seeing me. I must. Can you fix it?"

Eliza blinked, but she would never admit that there was anything she could not do.

"Yes, ma'am," she said.

And, somehow, she did.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CHANGING TIDES

I know
Love is the one intelligible word
Life utters. . . .

RICHARD HOVEY.

JANE sat, just as she had dropped down on first coming in and mechanically putting on a dressing-gown, motionless in the big chair. Jab the faithful was in her arms. Being a dog, he knew enough to keep very quiet.

The little clock which she had bought at the second-hand store in Greenwich Village struck two. The sound suggested to her the "small hours" beloved by writers for their pet deathbed scene. She knew that at such an hour life retreated in a curious and inevitable fashion back to its mysterious source.

The slow quiet cold that was creeping into her in spite of the season was not unlike the cold that might come from the ebbing of a vast flood of vi-

tality. She felt actually as though she had been flung up on great shores by a surf beyond human understanding; as though she had been left there, stark to the winds, while the tide crept back, chill and relentless as it had come.

The telephone rang.

The sound struck her ears so sharply that it almost hurt. In that blank, dead hour, when she loitered so close to the grave of things, what right had her scheme of the universe to a shock like that? The noise crushed a million delicate filaments; it wrenched her back, body and soul, into a world which she would willingly have foresworn. . . . Oh, dark and weary hour! Would there ever be anything of good or of gain that would make it up to her?

The telephone rang on. Jab whined in a reminding way.

The little ugly instrument, stuck so incongruously upon the wall, seemed to stare at her with its two owlsh eyes. The transmitter loomed there, hooked like the horn of the fabulous unicorn.

"I wish I had the courage to throw you out of the window," she muttered exhaustedly, "the way Marie Bashkirtseff threw the dining-room clock!"

She took up the receiver, and Tom Brainerd's

voice came to her. Its intonation was more electric than the electricity that brought it to her ears:

"I must come—now, immediately. . . . May I? I must,—now. . . . I——"

"Yes, come," she said, interrupting the incoherent and agitated message.

Then she hung up the receiver, and sat blankly, waiting. Of course it was all a dream. She would wake up before long. Tom and his voice,—it would be so natural to dream of them: naturally, also, she would wake up.

It was significant that she did not even look in the glass. She wore an ugly wrapper,—it was the same ugly wrapper which had so annoyed Otho in 'Frisco. And she was going to see the man she loved best of all the world. Yet she never had the impulse to make herself attractive for him. She did not know why he was coming, but, at any hour, and for any reason, it was right and fitting that he should come. . . .

It was probably half an hour, but it seemed to her rapt revery but a minute before he knocked lightly, and, without waiting, came in. He looked old and haggard, and he held out a letter.

"Read that," he said brusquely. "I'd have spared you if I possibly could."

Mechanically Jane took the sheet of paper into her hand, and mechanically she read it:

MY DEAR BRAINERD:

Of course you have put me in the wrong as usual by that ridiculous announcement of yours tonight. It is all so quite impossible. I do not believe that Jane cares very deeply for me. I sincerely hope not, because I do not want to hurt her. But I feel that my first duty is to the woman I love, the woman whom you yourself have so deeply wronged. I refer to Annette Llewellyn. If it is possible for you to be happy,—and to your brutal nature I suppose that is conceivable,—I hope you may be. Nettie and I have just been married. She wishes me to remind you that you have so entirely committed yourself to the management and production of the opera, that you cannot draw back without injuring yourself. . . .

Jane read to that point, and then she dropped the letter and began to laugh. Her eyes were wet, but she laughed. Jab leaped up to lick her face, and she hugged him.

"Oh," she gasped, "thank God he put that in! Doesn't it just save the whole situation? Oh, isn't it quite too heavenly that he should have run away with Nettie?"

"You're—glad?" stammered Tom.

"I love you," said little Jane very simply.

Jane had never looked less conventionally pretty than she did then, with the tears pouring down her cheeks, and her red hair hanging tousled upon her shoulders. And Tom Brainerd had never dreamed that a mere woman could look so like an angel.

Something of life, and eternity, and Heaven, and motherhood looked out of her eyes, and he leaned forward in utter reverence, and bent to kiss her fingers. And Jane, trembling, laughing, and crying all at once, patted his rough dark head and his big hands, and whispered little foolish, crooning words of love. It never entered my Jane's head, you see, to be shy with her man,—once she knew that she loved him.

"Jane,—you're laughing!" Tom breathed, gladly but astoundedly, as he looked up into those dear eyes of hers.

She nodded, cuddling Jab. Then she put out her two small hands and lifted Tom's face to hers.

"Oh, my dear, my dearest," she whispered softly as she kissed him, "don't you see?—It's just God's beautiful Joke!"

THE END

BANKED FIRES

By
E. W. SAVI

Author of "The Daughter-in-Law,"
"Sinners All," etc.

The love story of a strong man. "His was not a petty nature, given to the faults of the weak and timid. He was a daring and defiant sinner, risking damnation, as he had once said, 'for the desire of his heart.'" The scene is partly England and partly India. **Basil King** writes of the author: "From the very opening words she holds one with the spell which only the born story-teller possesses. . . . I know of no other Anglo-Indian stories which transport one so easily to the interior of Hindustan and make it seem so natural, and so much a matter of course to be there."

G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York

London

THE MOON POOL

BY

A. MERRITT

Romance, real romance, and wonderful adventure,—absolutely impossible, yet utterly probable! A story one almost regrets having read, since one can then no longer read it for the first time. Once in the proverbial blue moon there comes to the fore an author who can conceive and write such a tale. Here is one!

Few indeed will forget, who, with the Professor, watch the mystic approach of the Shining One down the moon path,—who follow with him and the others the path below the Moon Pool, beyond the Door of the Seven Lights;—and would there were more characters in fiction like Lakla the lovely and Larry O'Keefe the lovable.

Perhaps you readers will know who were those weird and awe-inspiring Silent Ones.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK

LONDON

The Lamp in the Desert

By

Ethel M. Dell

Author of "Greatheart," "The Way of an Eagle,"
"Bars of Iron," etc.

The story of a great love.

Once again Miss Dell transports us to India, that India which she knows so well, the land of mystery, intrigue, and deep passion. She shows us a man, a strong man who is ready to sacrifice fame and ambition, and even life itself, to shield from sorrow the woman he loves. In that darkest hour when the young mother realizes that she is wife in name only, even then the memory of his strength upholds her, and across the desert,—her bitter desert of ashes,—the lamp still shines throughout the darkness of pain and sorrow until the dawning of their new day of love and perfect recompense.

G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York

London

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

[illegible]

